



**IMPROVING CITIZEN
ENGAGEMENT: COMMUNITY
CONVERSATIONS AND
COLLABORATION ON ABC LOCAL
RADIO**

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Abstract

Public broadcasting radio now operates at a time of political disengagement, media consolidation and digital fragmentation.

The basis of this thesis is that new empirical research is essential to assess the significance of these latest developments that shape public broadcasting and to explore the possibilities for radio broadcasters to expand engagement with their audiences. Through an industry-informed and focused inquiry into local radio, this thesis advances an understanding of journalism ‘as conversation’, specifically those professional practices that attend to improving the diversity and depth of discourse and civic engagement. The research data collection methods for the investigation include: observation and discourse analysis of a series of radio forums covering contentious local issues in Tasmania and long qualitative interviews with journalists, participants- and leaders of public broadcasting.

It finds that an active commitment to collaboration, voice and diversity in conversational radio journalism practice can facilitate citizen engagement and public trust, as long as sufficient time and resources support such activity. Creating a space for intense focus on local issues, with debate framed transparently, not only produces opportunities for citizens to participate more fully in their communities, but creates empathy and builds consensus. This suggests that a wider function for local journalism is to not only inform the public, but also to pursue collaborative practices which empower citizens and foster social inclusion. As such, the thesis contributes to scholarship about the changing values of news and journalism, public broadcasting, journalism-as-conversation, and radio, and contributes insight to inform contemporary practice.

Declaration of Originality

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution, except by way of background information and duly acknowledged in the thesis, and to the best of my knowledge and belief no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgement is made in the text of the thesis, nor does the thesis contain any material that infringes copyright.

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Declaration of Ethical Conduct

The research associated with this thesis abides by the international and Australian codes on human and animal experimentation, the guidelines by the Australian Government's Office of the Gene Technology Regulator, and the rulings of the Safety, Ethics, and Institutional Biosafety Committees of the University.

Signed.....

..... Date: 19 October, 2017

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PART ONE

Theory and Methodology

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

It is lunchtime in Launceston, a city of eighty thousand people in Northern Tasmania, admired for its elegant colonial and Victorian architecture and century-old parks. Launceston is the second major city in the Australian island state of Tasmania. It prides itself on being a vibrant hub for food, wine, culture, and nature.

At one of its flashiest hotels, the weekly meeting of the Rotary Service District 9830 is a roll-call of the who's who of this conservative, English-speaking, mostly Anglo-Saxon community. The city's business owners, public servants, and other residents network over chicken and salad. Overseas aid and development projects, such as fundraising for mosquito nets in malarial zones in the Solomon Islands, are often on the Rotary meetings' agenda.

However, on 2 December 2013, Rotary 9830 is launching a pilot program designed to help with a rather uncomfortable problem on the city's doorstep – the fact that international students and migrants often feel unsafe, isolated, and victimised in the city. A special induction ceremony welcomes Seyum Getenet from Ethiopia, Jacky Chong from Malaysia, and Ugandans Michael Mzoora and Agatha Asimwe into the Rotary lunch club in the hope that they and some of their fellow University of Tasmania students might have a broader, more welcoming experience in Australia. It is 'certainly diversifying the membership in the Launceston club and making meetings that much more interesting' (Rotary newsletter, 2013).

While building connections with international students is an effort by Rotary to improve the experiences migrants sometimes encounter in Launceston, it also makes sound business sense. The struggling Launceston economy is relying upon the University of Tasmania's three-hundred-million-dollar city campus expansion to stimulate business and investment. With

increased international student enrolments integral to the University's development strategy, it is essential that Launceston develop a reputation as a tolerant and open city.

However, as a recent arrival from Sudan shared during a local radio broadcast, Launceston has a nasty problem with racism. This is consistent with research showing troubling levels of discrimination in Australia – particularly hostile attitudes towards Islam and Muslim people. A survey by the University of South Australia of one thousand people found that seventy percent of Australians had low levels of Islamophobia, twenty percent were undecided, and ten percent were classed as 'highly Islamophobic' (Hassan and Martin, 2015). John Ali arrived in Launceston from war-torn Sudan in 2003 and works for the Multicultural Council of Tasmania (MCoT), a community-based, member-driven organisation that 'empowers people from diverse and multicultural backgrounds to have a voice' (MCoT, 2017). During a *Community Conversation* forum on local public broadcaster radio, ABC Northern Tasmania, he spoke about the hostility and discrimination he frequently encounters as a dark-skinned man. It appalled two listeners, former Rotarian presidents Alex Brownlie and Tony Cannon, that migrants and international students were being subjected to such abuse. They contacted the University's community engagement officer, Jo Archer, another guest on the same radio forum, to see how Rotary 9830 could help to tackle racism and bigotry in the city.

Such projects can emerge when citizens become empowered and use civic tools available. Empowered citizens are the quiet heroes, change-makers and leaders who not only improve life for themselves, but for others around them as well. Finding out what is happening around them, and the quality of that news and information, is critical to what knowledge or influence they may possibly have. Thus, how and to what degree they stay informed about their communities carries added weight (Barthel et al., 2016). Public interest journalism, defined as 'the independent dissemination of trustworthy information that has been filtered and assessed by journalism professionals' (Kitchell, 2017), can provide essential context to help people

make sense of a complex and confusing barrage of information. It can assist us to take part in public debate, guide us how to vote and equip us with information to understand history, environment and culture, underpinning health, and wellbeing.

While society is still geographically organised and governed, how it is being informed is becoming increasingly virtual and globally interconnected in a networked world where journalists are no longer the gatekeepers. Technological and economic environments are creating an uncertain future for the type of journalism integral to truth and trust (Viner, 2016; Neilsen, 2015b; Dahlgren, 2013/1997/2009, Lee-Wright et al., 2011 Couldry, 2010). Increasingly polarised arguments (Levy, 2017), and deliberate misinformation in the media (Marwick and Lewis, 2017), featured in three major political campaigns in 2016. These were the election of Donald Trump in the US, the Brexit vote in the UK and to a lesser degree, the tight election result in Australia, which Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull said reflected a ‘general distrust or sense of disenfranchisement from government’ (Turnbull, 2016).

Commentators see factors driving polarisation as including: coarsening public discourse (Poole, 2016; Stroud, 2010), emotion overriding facts (Hermida, 2016; Baum, 2011), over-reliance on polling, the support of falsehoods (Kull, Ramsay, and Lewis, 2003), lack of media diversity and a tendency towards easy talk or online content over newsgathering (Sambrook, 2016; Vance, 2016). While analysis is still underway, it appears that Trump’s presidential bid was aided by fake news and Russian campaigns amplified by automated bots that created an artificial impression of wider support for his views, with one study finding that fake news engagement on Facebook surpassed that of mainstream news just before voting day (Hanson, 2017).

It came as no surprise therefore that Oxford Dictionaries’ 2016 International word of the year was ‘post-truth’, defined as ‘an adjective relating to circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than emotional appeals’ (English Oxford Living

Dictionaries, 2016). This demands more scrutiny of the ways media not only disseminate elite, critical opinion but also influence the formation and consumption of public opinion (Halloran, 1970; Lang and Lang, 1968). While ‘fake news’ is not a new phenomenon (Greenhill, 2017), the difference now is that commercial or political misinformation proliferates at high speeds via increasingly popular social networks; sometimes spread through panic, malice, or deliberate manipulation, in which a corporation or regime pays people to convey their message. Just being exposed to misinformation is potentially enough to shape people’s views (Callahan, 2017).

Regardless of how we get our news, media content and mediated information, one important truth prevails: we still need reliable information to make good decisions, for ourselves, our families, our community, the country we live in and the world we share (; McNair, 2012 Currah, 2009). Over the past thirty years, this dynamic and complex relationship between communities, the media and journalism has been a fascination to me as a working journalist and media manager, and it now confronting unprecedented challenges. Before exploring these themes further, this thesis acknowledges tensions within the various normative theories of media about ‘community’ means (Christians, 2009), and adopts Benedict Anderson’s definition that a community is socially constructed ‘in the style by which they are imagined’ (1983:6). Therefore, political communities are shaped by the quality (and qualities) of journalism, considered to be ‘the business or practice of producing and disseminating information about contemporary affairs of general public interest, and importance’ (Schudson, 2003:11). Journalism has moved away from a world in which some produce and many consume media in a top-down manner (Thompson, 1995), toward one in which everyone has a more active role in what is produced (Lenhardt and Madden, 2005; Blau, 2004). More than half of those surveyed in 2017 by the Reuters Institute for Journalism at Oxford University in its annual *Digital News Report* get their news from social media platforms, Facebook and Twitter, which is up five percentage points on 2016 and twice as many as accessed in 2013 (Newman et al.,

2017). As social media supports dissemination of content without any regard to accuracy this poses profound social and political implications, prompting a select Australian Senate Committee to launch an inquiry in May 2017 into the future of public interest journalism (Canning, 2017). It is looking specifically at the adequacy of competition and consumer laws in dealing with the ‘market power and practices of search engines, social media aggregators and content aggregators, and their impact on the Australian media landscape’ (Select Committee on Future of Public Interest Journalism, 2017).

Local media under pressure

In Australia, the crisis of journalism is nowhere more evident than in the local and regional sectors (MEAA, 2017; McNair, 2016b), where most citizens interact with local councils, schools, hospitals and transport systems. Back in 2012, the Australian Government’s Report of the Independent Inquiry into the Media and Media Regulation by Ray Finklestein, commonly referred to as the Finkelstein report, sounded a warning that some local communities are already the poorer for losing local news outlets and the issue should be urgently investigated (Finklestein, 2012:11). Commercial local radio, newspapers and television news outlets are contracting, forced by the loss of market power they used to have with local advertising before commercialisation of the internet (Lee-Wright et al., 2011; Picard, 2010 Picard, 2008). Traditionally perceived to be on-the ground and defined by circulation or broadcast footprint, what constitutes ‘local’ media is being redefined by significant social and technological change, with internet usage experiencing huge growth since the mid-1990s. People can now stream local radio, television, or digital content from anywhere, which means local journalism faces the challenge of not only of covering local affairs, but also identifying ways that resonate with their audience about what is local and why local is even relevant (Nielsen, 2015a). It is

often described by scholars as circulating in local ecosystems, associated with a geographic locale and defined by a population of actors (including media), the interactions between these actors and their relations with a wider environment (see McKenzie, 2011; Janowitz, 1952), often delineated by economic boundaries (a media market defined by advertisers and media companies), administrative boundaries (a municipality defined by law) or often contested social boundaries defining different communities (like our suburb). While these definitions of locality do not necessarily coincide (Stacey, 1969), each provides starting points for analysis, thus the ‘local’ in local media is not revealed as a given in this thesis, but as construct, a particular orientation and a sense of what community media scholar Kristy Hess (Hess and Waller, 2014:122; Hess, 2013), calls ‘geo-social news’ in a digital landscape; local and regional media primarily orientated towards covering more circumscribed geographic territory than national or global media.

Changes to local media are happening in distinct and powerful ways, with media consolidation and digital fragmentation key factors in the decline of local media, particularly the disappearance of local newspapers in many towns, leaving citizens starved of information and local institutions less accountable (Barnett and Townend, 2015; McNair, 2012; Dell Carpini and Keeter, 2004; Galston, 2001:3; Campbell, 1999; Smith, 1987; Lemert, 1981). As Chapter Three will examine further, a reduction of commercial public affairs programming and the rise in entertainment-focused and PR-driven content are also heightening fears about quality journalism and public accountability (ABC, 2016b; Tiffen, 2009; Dahlgren, 2003), as Paul Murphy from the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) told the 2017 Senate Select Committee inquiry into the Future of Public Interest Journalism:

The real story is this: newsrooms have shrunk; specialisation has been replaced by multi-skilling; research, investigation, depth, and accuracy are being lost. In short,

the media industry is creaking at the seams trying to provide public interest journalism necessary to inform our communities, scrutinise the rich and powerful and hold them to account, and to play its role as the fourth estate in a healthy, functioning democracy. (MEAA, 2017)

Murphy's concern about the reduction of research, investigation depth and accuracy is reflected in recent scholarship (Dahlgren, 2011/2009; Franklin, 2008; Schudson, 2008), and includes evidence that journalism practices and formats are failing to engage with, and reflect, social and geographic diversity (Jakubowicz et al., 2016; Stroud, 2010; PWC Australia, 2016). Indeed, prominent Australian writer and media presenter, Waleed Aly, criticises contemporary media today for succumbing to 'received ideas' and failing to spark real public debates (ABC, 2016b). As the pioneering Iranian blogger Hossein Derakhshan, who was imprisoned in Tehran for six years for his online activity, wrote in 2016: 'diversity that the world wide web had originally envisioned' has given way to 'the centralisation of information' inside a select few social networks – and the end result is 'making us all less powerful in relation to government and corporations' (Viner, 2016).

Media and participation

Understanding more about the role that journalistic organisations play in destabilised and fragmented public discourse is important because they are critical to the functioning of society. Political and community life has become so extensively situated within media's domain (McNair, 2009; Castells, 2003; Meyer, 2002; Garnham, 2000), that its various logics shape what gets taken up in the media (Starkey, 2007), how people participate and the modes of representation (Dahlgren, 2009; Couldry, 2003; Bennett and Entman, 2001; Thompson, 1995). Democracy, as a theory and practice, is generally used to refer to the rights and responsibilities

of citizens in capitalist economies (Keane, 1991), with the will of those people expressed through participation, representation and consent playing a central role in legitimatising the democracy. Some view it as needing ‘a maximally alert, active and vocal public’ (Hirschmann, 1970:31–2) and modern representative democracies are founded on the principle of elected officials representing a group, enabling good government most effectively if citizen’s decisions are based on reliable, sometimes oppositional and accurate information (Chambers and Costain, 2001; Habermas, 1989). Therefore, participation in media and matters of trust are viewed by many scholars (Dahlgren 2013/2009; McNair, 2012; Aarlberg and Curran, 2012; Warren, 1999; Neilsen and Levy, 2010) as critical to enabling diverse and plural voices to contest ideas, inform citizens and influence their electoral choices. More research is required at the local level (Levy and Neilsen, 2010; Hindman, 2008), as the discourse of neoliberalism dominates the contemporary world, particularly how broader media practices and forms of organisation may subtly undermine or devalue voice (Couldry, 2010).

While citizens and the media retain important roles in ensuring representative forms of democracy, in many developed countries the health of democracy is in trouble. A 2016 report by the Institute of Governance and Policy Analysis and the Museum of Australian Democracy found satisfaction with democracy is at its lowest level in ten years (Evans et al., 2016). Key measures of decline included low levels of traditional forms of political participation, partisan alignment and low trust in politicians and political institutions (*Endelman’s Trust Barometer*, 2017; Kellner, 2012; Dahlgren, 2009; Zukin et al., 2006; Coleman, 2005/2008). The communications marketing firm Endelman, which conducts an annual global trust and credibility survey, has found that people are also trusting the media less. *Endelman’s Trust Barometer* (2017) shows declining overall trust in institutions while trust in media (forty-three percent), fell precipitously, and is at all-time lows in seventeen countries. There is low trust in both media professionals and the profession of journalism itself; more than fifty-nine percent

of people surveyed would rather believe a search engine than a human editor and more than half (fifty-three percent), do not regularly listen to people or organisations they disagree with (Endelman Trust, 2017). Australian TV reporters, newspaper journalists and radio announcers consistently rate poorly in terms of public perception of their ethics, ranking in the bottom third of professions for honesty and ethics (Roy Morgan Research, 2016), despite journalistic functions of disclosure, redress, community formation and diversity being perceived to be integral to democratic health (Dahlgren, 2009; Franklin, 2008; Schudson, 2008).

People want news, particularly local news, but they just don't trust it. The *Digital News Report Australia 2017*, a collaboration between the News and Media Research Centre at the University of Canberra and the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford, shows about sixty-three percent of respondents said they were very, or extremely, interested in news, with most were interested in 'news about my region, city or town' (Park, 2017:9). In regional Australia, eighty-six percent of people say local news is important to them (radioinfo.com, 2017). This highlights the importance of understanding more about some of the practical responses and practices that media organisations can take to improve the quality of journalism, public trust, and civic engagement, a concept defined as ways in which citizens participate in the life of a community to improve conditions for others or to help shape the community's future (Adler and Goggin, 2005). Of particular interest to this inquiry, are the changing functions and roles of journalism at the local level, where traditional media businesses have been shattered (Viner, 2016; Lewis et al., 2013; Glasser, 2000; Gans, 1979; Schudson, 1978). Despite media operating within specific institutional and cultural contexts that determine how and why they are used (Jenkins et al., 2009; Jenkins, 2006; DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach, 1989), research and public policy discussions about news have mostly focused on emerging technologies and ownership, or on matters like alleged liberal political biases of

journalists rather than serving the needs of democracy, writes US political scientist W. Lance Bennett:

Meaningful change requires people to better understand some of the underlying defects in the current communication system. In particular, change requires thinking more critically about how to, inform people in ways to bring them together around programs of political action that might actually solve problems in society and government. (Bennett 2016; xiii)

This call to rethink the profession of journalism challenges traditional principles influenced by the so-called libertarian and social responsibility modes of the press (Christians et al., 2009; Siebert et al., 1963), which include norms such as objectivity, fairness, and multi-sourcing and within a contemporary participatory culture. Journalism's traditional functions, contends Katharine Viner, *The Guardian's* editor-in-chief, are being undermined by entertainment, public relations, and quick-moving disinformation:

...We are in the midst of a fundamental change in the values of journalism – a consumerist shift. Instead of strengthening social bonds, or creating an informed public, or the idea of news as a civic good, a democratic necessity, it creates gangs, which spread instant falsehoods that fit their views, reinforcing each other's beliefs, driving each other deeper into shared opinions, rather than established facts. (Viner, 2016)

The creation of 'gangs' that Viner refers to, particularly on Facebook and Twitter, is aided by stories all looking the same on news feeds on smartphones, whether they come from a credible source or not and increasingly, otherwise-credible sources are also publishing false, misleading, or deliberately outrageous stories as business models of most news organisations become increasingly based around digital 'clicks' to maximise advertising revenue (Blom and

Hansen, 2015; Gillan, 2010). Some commentators contend no detached way of reporting even exists (Haas, 2010), that journalists should be problem solving instead of truth seeking (Rosen, 1999), and that objective-ridden reporting is inadequate to handle the complexities of life, contributing to citizens' disenchantment with public life and news (Rosen, 1994; Carey, 1989).

Local Radio

At the heart of this thesis therefore are questions about what gets presented and whose voice is heard on local radio and the ways local media can strengthen social ties and build public trust, particularly facilitating civic public debate about matters of common interest. It will concentrate on the medium of radio because of its resilience (Starkey, 2016; Lindgren and Phillips, 2014; Starkey and Crisell, 2009), and its potential to be engaging, dynamic and important (UNESCO, 2017). Contemporary Australian research suggests it is essential to the life of regional and remote communities (Simons et al., 2016; Lake, 2016). As the literature review will examine, radio is a relatively under-theorised medium (Starkey and Crisell, 2009; Lindgren and Phillips, 2005), and there is limited program-specific analysis in radio research about liveness and performativity and how those qualities may enhance or diminish civic life. What is clear is that radio is adapting to 21st century changes and offering new ways to interact and participate (Starkey, 2016; Starkey and Crisell, 2009). Increasingly, more people use smartphones to stream digital radio services, access podcasting or audio-on-demand and to interact with content via a variety of digital technologies like social media (Watkins et al., 2016; Starkey, 2016; Newman et al., 2015). Radio provides an enduring platform to bring communities together, as highlighted in this online commentary by Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO:

On the way to work, in our homes, offices and fields, in times of peace, conflict and emergencies, radio remains a crucial source of information and knowledge, spanning generations and cultures, inspiring us with the wealth of humanity's diversity, and connecting us with the world. Radio gives voice to women and men everywhere. It listens to audiences and responds to needs. It is a force for human rights and dignity and a powerful enabler of solutions to the challenges. (UNESCO, 2017)

As highlighted by Bokova, radio is specifically suited to reach remote communities and vulnerable people: the illiterate, the disabled, women, and the poor. It also offers a platform to intervene in the public debate, irrespective of people's educational level or geographic location, offering a beacon for innovative solutions to local problems.

Where social media and audience fragmentation can put us in media bubbles of like-minded people, radio is uniquely positioned to bring communities together and foster positive dialogue for change. By listening to its audiences and responding to their needs, radio provides the diversity of views and voices needed to address the challenges we all face. (UNESCO, 2017)

Bokova's statement about radio's capacity for social cohesion and fostering positive dialogue for change through providing a diversity of voices contrasts with research showing that not everyone is being represented in, and by the news (Ewing, 2016; Harding, 2015; Norris, 2001; Couldry, 2008; McChesney, 1999; Murdock and Golding, 1989). This is even more troubling in Australia as it one of the most concentrated media markets in the western world (Watkins et al., 2016; Noam, 2011). The broadcast landscape features three commercial free-to-air TV networks, digital TV services and two public broadcasters, as well as a variety of commercial radio networks and audio streaming services. Under proposed new laws, current ownership restrictions would be lifted to allow mergers and acquisitions and potentially further shrink the ownership pool. While there are new international players like *Guardian Australia*, *BuzzFeed*,

The New York Times, and *Huffington Post*, they do not routinely cover local news. The Murdoch-controlled News Corporation and Fairfax Media together control more than ninety percent of the daily newspaper circulation (Watkins et al., 2016), with a ninety-eight percent reach of audience on news sites, controlling the way their information is aggregated and used by other digital sites the audience might be looking at (Phillips, 2015).

Nearly forty percent using radio news programs as sources of news, well ahead of printed newspapers and websites of newspapers (Watkins et al., 2016). This can involve quick reports, news bulletins read on the hour, current affairs programming, investigative reporting, analysis or matters of contemporary interest being discussed between individuals or groups as part of live, or on-demand/podcast programming. Radio journalism is as ‘much product of the world it seeks to represent to its audience as it is a reflection of the world’ (Starkey and Crisell, 2009:101), and in this thesis, it is understood to also include talk radio and journalism-as-a-conversation (Rosen, 1994; Anderson et al., 1994; Carey, 1989).

Journalism as conversation

While radio does not provide any images, talk is the very essence of news and current affairs, with reporters, interviews, announcements, and debates (Starkey and Crisell, 2009), and the medium of radio is comfortable with ideas and abstractions (Crisell, 2004). As journalism is intrinsically tied to interpersonal communication and community building, it is therefore argued (Anderson et al., 1996), that journalism and conversation are companion concepts. The concept of journalism-as-conversation is associated with the late American communication theorist James Carey (1989/1992), who criticised the dominant libertarian model of journalism with the famous observation that ‘the true subject of matter of journalism is the conversation the public is having with itself’ (Rosen, 1997:191). Conversation, as defined by US scholar

Doreen Marchionni (2013), has distinct qualities, most especially its emphasis on meaningful democratic deliberation by the public on problems of public import and building a public and fostering effective conversation and deliberation. This is in contrast to the thinking about journalism itself as a *'lecture'*, in which the professional journalist alone presumably knows what is news and conducts a monologue with the public and sources on such matters, rendering citizens as mere bystander (Marchionni, 2013:143). However, Cardiff University's director of Journalism and former BBC News executive, Richard Sambrook, contends the practices of contemporary media are actually reinforcing distance: both social and geographic because journalists do not work effectively for, and with, the communities they serve:

...Media has too easily become part of the political/celebrity bubble and tends to forget that journalism is meant to be an 'outsider' activity – outside the halls of power, but not outside the communities it serves. The lure of celebrity status has taken too many journalists into the arms of those they should be challenging. True independence – political, corporate, cultural – is rare and hard to achieve. It is to be prized for that reason. (Sambrook, 2016)

What Sambrook highlights is the need for media to reinforce independence, rigour, and challenge by strengthening public spaces for debate and listening, yet a radio journalist is constrained by time, schedule and program formats which present a partial or incomplete view of the world (Starkey, 2007). US journalism scholar Jeff Jarvis, quoted in a blog post, suggests an overhaul of professional practices is needed to create more mechanisms for listening to provide better context about issues:

We think we inform the public debate when, in fact, we should be reflecting the debate by listening more carefully to the needs of the community, and then deliver context-specific journalism. (Abbott, 2017)

This recommendation from Jarvis for media organisations to review the role and function of journalism to enable practitioners to listen more carefully to their communities and reflect their needs is supported by the former head of the Al Jazeera network, Wadah Khanfar. He argued on the ABC public affairs panel-audience television program, *Q&A*, that engaging with, and reflecting on, people's real concerns is critical if journalism is to retain relevance and influence:

We are not putting the human being at the centre, we are not the voice for the people, we have lost courage. This is why people are searching for other outlets in order to understand what is happening in the world. (*Q&A*, 2017)

Khanfar's call for journalists to contextualise social reality and prioritise understanding to restore public trust and build relevance, prompts three key questions for this investigation: **Which voices get heard in local media and why? How can debate about matters of common interest be better facilitated at the local level? How can local radio practices strengthen social ties and help to recover public trust in the media?**

1.1 Aim and Scope

Like the wider profession of journalism, local journalism is being changed by a wider structural transformation being driven, in part, by the rise of digital media. This is commonly conceived as decreasing the capacity of local communities to engage in democratic processes. Yet people need to have opportunities through local news and information to build knowledge, to understand issues and be engaged with decisions affecting their lives. Communities are not well served when the accountability of local officialdom goes unchecked and when concentrated media power means less avenues for redress, less diversity, and less opportunity for access (Couldry, 2008; Tiffen, 1994). Some optimism lies with collaboration, which ‘creates a shared meaning about a process, a product or an event’ (Schrage, 1990:40), and the growth of new digital hyperlocal media ventures. However, there is growing concern about over the erosion of voice at the local level and the unchecked power exercised by internet giants promoting a certain political and economic view of the world (Holmes, 2016; Phillips, 2015; Bell et al., 2014).

The aim of this thesis therefore is to consider if and how local radio through journalism-as-conversation can strengthen social ties and restore public trust. It will ask what professional practices promote diversity and improved access of voice, providing a greater understanding of how debate about matters of common interest can be better facilitated at the local level. In doing so, it will contribute to scholarship about the social ideals of democracy and the contemporary role of public service broadcasting in advancing knowledge and social inclusion. In recognition of the inclusion of online and social media, it will be described as public service media in this thesis (Donders, Pauwels, and Loisen, 2012).

To meet this aim, this thesis will examine the context and practices of three *Community Conversation* events, a series of ABC Local Radio collaborative forums supported by limited

internet and social media activity, in the island state of Tasmania. These forums are sited away from broadcasting studios and involve citizens embedded in their communities who influence, or are directly influenced by, certain matters of social and political importance. Research methods, which include interviews, participation observation and analysis of text, will be employed to generate data for analysis from the three case studies. It is anticipated that close reading of this data will produce new theoretical and empirical insights into how local public broadcasting radio can facilitate more nuanced debate, better inform individuals, and empower local communities. The analysis also aims to produce findings of practical relevance for radio broadcasting and journalism. This thesis is interested in identifying necessary ingredients for social information systems to encourage a diverse culture that builds knowledge, values, and promotes truth and develops public trust.

Therefore, it must pursue two strands: the heuristic study of media practice and the normative approach of making judgements about contemporary practice in a fast-changing media and social environment. As such, it needs to be about many things. It is about the provision of quality information essential for healthy democracy. It is about the state of civic and political engagement and what role local media has in this landscape with its key democratic functions of accountability, redress and reflecting diversity. It is about the disruption, opportunities and deficiencies of interactive media and public participation. It is about the dangers of the decline of localism, particularly in regional areas. It is about radio and public participation, and the values and purpose of public broadcasting. It is about radio media practices and routines. And most importantly, it is about whose voice is being heard and how the interplay of media practices, localism and public service media can better serve the audience and the community. At a time of rapid transformation in the media sector, current critical debate is not keeping abreast of what the public expects, or needs, from local radio to support ideals of democracy.

1.2 Structure

Most journalism is practised – and most news media organisations are based – at the local level yet most journalism research is orientated towards a limited number of exceptional and often nationally or internationally-orientated news media organisations (Neilsen, 2015a). Studying local journalism culture is important as ‘local journalism is part of a social cement which binds communities together and is widely and rightly viewed as an essential element in the construction of local identity’ (McNair, 2006:37). This thesis must therefore locate and identify the appropriate literature on local journalism and radio. It needs to traverse across contemporary industry examinations of media practices, trends and pressures, and scholarly investigations of political knowledge, community cohesion and civic participation. It is also necessary to cross into several key theoretical and methodological areas and draw on a diverse range of scholarship to produce a productive framework and theoretical approach for this investigation. Sources will include reports on industry developments, broadcaster annual reports and media coverage of contemporary issues as well as theoretical and academic scholarship. Citizens are said to be disillusioned and disconnected from political engagement, turned off by a dysfunctional media they cannot trust (Watkins et al., 2016), and journalists are also worried about declining standards and lower credibility of their profession (Hanusch, 2015/ 2016). In Chapter Two, this thesis will examine both theoretical debate and empirical research about democracy and local journalism. Local media’s capacity to provide accountability, redress, and reflect diversity are key lines of inquiry in this investigation. As it is an important source of news and information, many scholars view local journalism as essential to political knowledge and participation (Waldman, 2011; Dahlgren, 2009; McNair, 2012; Mastin, 2000; Campbell, 1999). Therefore, literature focused on the role local media plays in providing political knowledge and creating community cohesion is of particular interest, and the gaps which have emerged from the massive flux in the industry and significant

social change, mostly linked to the rise of digital technologies. This is influencing the type of content generated by media companies as they compete for audiences and advertising, with a substantial hike in ‘spin’ on behalf of society elites or entertainment-focused and PR driven content. What consequences this has for civic and political engagement is to be explored through analysis of local journalism’s supposed functions of providing accountability reporting. Contemporary debate about tensions between the so called ‘crisis’ in civic and political engagement and the rise in new participatory, citizen-led, and collaborative practices will also be examined.

Chapter Three will then consider the medium of radio within the contexts established in the Chapter Two. Academic approaches to radio have drawn on a number of different disciplines, including a growing body of medium-specific radio theory which uses political, sociological and economic perspectives, as well as certain cultural history paradigms. As media is seen to be such a powerful meeting point in democratic openness, this investigation will also expand to the motivation and approach of public broadcasters and media practitioners (Cottle 2003, Bourdieu 2003). Within this context, there will be scrutiny of the professional practices of journalism, like source-media relations and listening and how they aid or hinder public engagement and participation. A major area of focus will be the contested terrain of voice and news access as it relates to local journalism and radio.

Gaps in research identified in the review of literature in Chapters Two and Three help formulate key research questions and methods outlined in Chapter Four. Research methods will include semi-structured interviews of participants and program makers, observation, textual analysis, and analysis of discourse features.

This mixed methods approach will be deployed in Chapters Five, Six and Seven in the study of three separate ABC Local Radio *Community Conversation* radio forums conducted in

Tasmania in 2013. These events in regional and metropolitan radio markets will be used to test and explore my key research questions. Chapter Eight will reiterate substantive findings and theoretical contributions, discuss how theses inform current understanding about local journalism, voice, radio, civic engagement, and media practices as well suggesting future research possibilities.

Research setting

From a social, political and media perspective, Tasmania is an interesting site to explore the themes and challenges of this inquiry into local media and citizen engagement. With its population of 515,000, Australia's island state may appear in glossy tourism brochures as a seductive showcase of gourmet food, national parks, and colonial history. However, it has less impressive socio-economic reality for those who live in its decentralised communities. Tasmanians are the unhealthiest, worst educated, most under-employed and most dependent on government benefits (Eslake, 2016). Low interest rates and a falling exchange rate may have recently helped the state's economy with housing construction, retail, and tourism (Deloitte, 2015a). However, for the past decade the state has lagged behind other Australian states on virtually every dimension of social, economic and cultural performance (West, 2013). It has the highest prevalence of disability in the nation (ABS, 2013). When it comes to educational standards in Tasmania, only twenty-two percent of people aged twenty-five to thirty-four have a bachelor degree or higher qualifications compared to thirty-two percent nationally (Australian Government, 2013). The state has not been immune to the recent political disruption experienced in the US and UK, as noted in a 2016 report authored by economist Saul Eslake for the Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, which highlights that education and workforce participation are two areas holding Tasmania back:

Jobs, industries and services have been disappearing from communities, leaving incomes stagnating and feeding the inequality that has resulted in many feeling marginalised. (Eslake, 2016)

To improve the social inequality, he contends the state needs to reshape structures, expectations, attitudes, and community culture. Consultation in 2016 by the lead social support agency Tasmanian Council of Social Services, heard views from community representatives that decision makers don't have a 'real-life' idea of their problems or priorities. Participants stated that Tasmanian communities have little or no input into creating solutions and that there are very few opportunities for co-design of state or local government programs (Eslake, 2016), suggesting they lack opportunities to have their voice heard.

Media in Tasmania

Since the early 1990s, Australia's communications and regional media landscape has been transformed by new technologies and structural changes in mobile and fixed broadband networks, including the yet-to-be completed rollout of the National Broadband Network (NBN). Commercial media is the predominant source of local content and local news in regional Australia and, to extend reach, some local content providers are collaborating to provide the same local news across their respective platforms and local news aggregation had increased (radioinfo.com, 2017).

Some metropolitan TV networks in mid-2016 changed affiliation arrangements with their regional TV network counterparts. All of Tasmania's major commercial media outlets are controlled by national companies or organisations. The capital city Hobart's newspaper *The Mercury* is owned by News Limited while Fairfax controls *The Examiner* in Tasmania's second

largest city Launceston, as well as the former rival publication, *The Advocate* on the North-West coast. Of the state's five free to air broadcast television stations, WINTV, Southern Cross, the ABC, Channel Nine and SBS, three produce local news content. Ten other free digital channels are also available.

Tasmania has ten registered community radio stations, focused on certain demographics and specialist content. Major national commercial networks dominate the radio landscape. Commercial radio stations licensed to cover the Hobart market include Hit109 and Triple M, run by national network Southern Cross Austereo (which also owns Southern Cross Television). 7HO FM is owned by the Australia's regional network Grant Broadcasters which also controls the leading commercial radio stations in Tasmania (LAFM and ChilliFM in Launceston, SeaFM in Devonport and Burnie). While most stations provide local breakfast and daytime programming, there is a strong reliance on networked programming and news. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation broadcasts two stations that are Tasmanian-based; 936 ABC Hobart (rebranded as ABC Radio Hobart in 2017), and ABC Northern Tasmania, respectively serving the southern and northern regions. ABC Northern Tasmania presents its own *Breakfast* and *Drive* programs but otherwise broadcasts a combination of statewide programs from ABC Hobart and networked national content. ABC has news staff in the North West, North and Southern areas of the state, producing TV and radio content with multiplatform digital reporters filing to the national website and local home pages from each area. A statewide TV bulletin is broadcast each day at 7pm with local news updates on radio throughout the day before networked news commences at 8pm until 6am. Since 2011, the online website *Tasmanian Times* has been the island state's most high profile alternative media outlet (Lester and Hutchins, 2012), described by its editor Lindsey Tuffin as 'a forum of discussion and dissent - a cheeky, irreverent challenge to the mass media's obsession with

popularity, superficiality and celebrity' (Tuffin, 2017). Tasmania also has thirteen registered community radio stations, tourist and lifestyle magazines, with limited public reach and impact.

1.3 Statement of significance

The thesis will contribute to scholarly debate relating to the functions of journalism, social inclusion, local media, and radio. By examining the social role of public broadcasting radio, it will inform collaborative journalism practice, and advance existing research on localism, journalism-as-conversation, listening and civic engagement. It will provide industry with contemporary research for policy consideration and insights into practical approaches which provide, to varying degrees, ways to enable voice and access, build trust and deepen community engagement in journalism as it navigates the future in an uncertain and competitive environment.

CHAPTER TWO: LOCAL JOURNALISM AND CITIZENSHIP

2.1 Introduction

With the broad context of this thesis now established, the purpose of this chapter is to review the literature and contemporary research relating to questions about local journalism and citizenship. Interest is in how previous scholarship has examined whose voice is heard on local media, the ways the media can strengthen social ties and build public trust, and how radio broadcasters can better facilitate public discourse about matters of common interest.

As discussed in Chapter One, local journalism is an important source of information, necessary to some level of civic and political engagement and integral, it is argued, to community cohesion (Franklin and Richardson, 2002; Tichenor et al., 1980). It is also buckling under enormous commercial and political pressures.

At its best, democratic politics create and sustain social relationships – the human conversation and engagement that draws people together and allow them to discover their mutuality. In broad terms, this happens through an inclusive process of deliberation, debate, conflict, and compromise, and the ‘role of the media must be taken into account in an assessment of our capacity for citizenship’ (Horne, 1994:7). Journalistic functions of disclosure, redress, community formation and diversity are widely perceived to be integral to democratic processes. Participation is an activity at the heart of conceptions of deliberative democracy and central to decision-making with elements of both consensus decision-making and majority rule. Under models of representative democracy, people elect politicians as their representatives who are given the task of creating laws and policies and vote on issues in lieu of the public, supposedly to reflect the will of the people. Not every citizen expects to speak personally in the governing

dialogue, but every citizen is entitled to feel authentically represented (Greider, 2010:10). Yet representation is a complex idea and there are tensions in the literature about how participation and consensus both serve and threaten democratic inclusion. As discussed in the Chapter One, ‘local’ in local media is approached as a construct linked to territory (Hess and Waller, 2014; Hess, 2013), critical in the development of political knowledge and participation, with research showing the more politically knowledgeable people are, the more likely they are to become actively involved in decisions regarding their communities (Dell Carpini and Keeter, 2004/2001/1996). Five dimensions deemed relevant to the successful creation of knowledge within a community, identified by organisational theorist Georg von Krogh, are: mutual trust, active empathy, access to help, lenience in judgment, and courage (von Krogh, 1998:137). Guided by this framework, this thesis seeks to understand more about the values and practices of journalists in enabling or hindering public knowledge at the local level. Socially, there are expectations that local media will foster social integration and prioritise solutions as much as problems in its news coverage (Wenzel et al., 2016; Kim and Ball-Rokeach, 2006; Friedland, 2001; Lippman, 1997/1922; Janowitz, 1952). However, the economics of media production increasingly constrain the delivery of local journalism (Lee-Wright et al., 2012; Russell, 2011; Shirky 2009; Friedland, 2001).

In this era of accelerating digitisation, audiences are moving online, mostly on mobile devices, which is redefining media practices, priorities and indeed, the nature of community and political life (Watkins et al., 2016; Newman, et al., 2016). Journalism has never been easier to access or more difficult to monetise, with international data showing only a small minority in most countries are prepared to pay anything for online news (Newman, 2016:14/2017:34). In many Australian communities, there is only one local newspaper, typically with a declining readership and commercial TV and radio services are being eroded. This situation has not only led to a reduction in mainstream media diversity but produced more entertainment-focused and

PR driven content and less accountability journalism (e.g. Davis, 2008; Manning, 2008; Lewis et al., 2008; Cottle, 2003; Franklin, 2006). This is despite the emergence of fledgling hyperlocal projects and collaborative efforts with mainstream media, to be discussed later in this chapter.

Public service media, which has a legislated role to provide local news and other content, is confronting political and economic pressures, including questions about reach and relevance. Meanwhile, media companies are scrambling to identify advertising revenue streams to survive. The contest between ‘socially responsible’ theories of the press pitted against commercial logic is producing major fissures. Many scholars have argued that the situation has created problems, even a ‘crisis’ (Bourdieu, 1998; Habermas, 1997; Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995; Blumler, 1991), in political and civic engagement (McNair, 2013a; Shaker, 2012; Levy and Neilsen, 2010; Curran et al. 2009; Lewis et al., 2008; Putnam, 2000). With this unfinished scenario unfolding amid massive social and technological change, two contradictory schools of thought have emerged. Some say the erosion of localism means power is no longer held to account and civic engagement is undermined by increased reliance on elite sources and the deregulation of media structures (Neilsen, 2015a; Scheufele 2000, Shanahan, and Kim 2002; Epstein, 1973).

Others argue that the rise of new and participatory media give people access to media platforms not available in the past which is invigorating citizenship in powerful ways. The reality, it is argued, is a mixture of both worlds (McNair, 2012).

Using an extended descriptor of the public interest value of news (McNair, 2009), there are four interrelated democracy-enabling roles for news: a source of accurate information for citizens, a watchdog/fourth estate, a mediator and/or representative of communities, and an advocate of the public in campaigning terms (McNair, 2009:237; Barnett, 2009). Similarly,

Franklin writes ‘local newspapers should offer independent and critical commentary on local issues, make local elites accountable, and provide a forum for the expression of local views on issues of community concern’ (Franklin, 2006: xix). Some commentators argue that public interest journalism needs to be redefined to reflect the breath of what it really is: the independent dissemination of trustworthy information that has been filtered and assessed by journalism professionals (Kitchell, 2107).

Research about local journalism is not as extensive, detailed or systematically comparative as the debate on national news media (Nielsen, 2015a), with studies tending to focus on platforms (newspapers versus television), the differences between media content (e.g. news versus entertainment), or overshadowed by concern with effects of national media (Lee-Wright et al., 2012; Russell, 2011; Fenton, 2010; Friedland and McLeod, 1999). It is also difficult to deduce from studies of national media just what will happen to media at a local level (Nielsen, 2015b), as national media is orientated towards the 24/7 breaking-news cycle and is characterised by intense competition between multiple news outlets covering the same stories and appealing to the same audiences:

Much of what we know about local journalism is therefore based on individual case studies or research from one community or country, sometimes work completed well before the current changes in our media environment pick up pace. (Nielsen, 2015b:5)

Nielsen emphasises an urgent need for more contemporary scholarly research into local media and its role as a source of information and as something that ties communities together. At the local level, news is seen as having a net positive effect on political civic engagement (Nielsen, 2015a:15), and attention to local news has been found to include civic engagement more broadly (Brandel et al., 2016; Shah et al., 2001), with the closure of local newspapers in various

American cities shown to be followed by significant drops in civic engagement (Shaker, 2014). Studies, controlling for socio-economic variables and interest, have also shown that local newspaper use has a positive involvement in local politics (Scheufele et al., 2002), and that local news media can have a positive effect, specifically on local election turnout (e.g. Gentzkow et al., 2009).

2.2 Democratic ideals and the public sphere

This thesis is focused on how media at the local level has the ‘power to signify events in a significant way’, as cultural theorist Stuart Hall puts it (1982:69), and how it provides important sites of social action and intervention. With the functions of society and government relying upon the connection between journalism and democracy as discussed in Chapter One, the two ‘are intertwined for good and for bad, and a change in one will have implications for the other’ (Neilsen and Levy, 2010:3).

The view that mainstream media is irrelevant or even harmful to political democracy is linked to elite theoretical models of democracy: that the government is the will of the people (Lippman, 1922:63; 1925). Despite believing ‘the voters have a good deal of information about the policies of the candidate’ (Dahl, 1961:101), early theorising on democracy ignored media processes, the adequacy of information from the media or whether a voter could even question the system. Public participation was deemed by Schumpeter (1976), as unnecessary nor desirable, saying that it need not provide for nor promote people’s intelligent political involvement or reflection, since ‘meaningful understanding of social forces and structural problems is beyond the populace’s capacity’ (cited in Baker, 2002:133).

Scandals like the apparent manipulation of security services' data by the Bush and Blair Governments before the 2003 Iraq war, however, suggest the elitist models of democracy overestimate the accountability and competency of policy makers (Hackett and Carroll, 2006). The emphasis of Schumpeter and others on private consumption rather than public virtue is aligned with neoliberalism, the 'free market' vision of democracy which has gained political and cultural hegemony since 1980s, often justified on the basis of individual rights, freedom and choice, particularly economic rights of ownership and exchange, with the notion of 'responsibility' increasingly a defining feature of the current era of neo-liberal globalisation. Neoliberalism positions business domination of society most effectively (McChesney (1999/2001), when there is a representative democracy featuring a weak and ineffectual polity typified by high degrees of depoliticisation, especially among the poor and working class. Critics point to the dangers of concentrated power and wealth, leading to improper media influence and access, as demonstrated in the 2012 phone hacking scandal which revealed collusion and improper influence between Rupert Murdoch's *News of the World* and UK police and policy makers. It led to two government inquiries, including the Leveson report into the culture, practices and ethics of UK press and its relationships with police and politicians.

The features of an ideal democracy, to the extent that they exist, are realised in representative democracies through representation itself, through which all major government decisions and policies are made by popularly elected officials accountable to the electorate for their actions.

Its other institutions include free and frequent elections, freedom of expression and association – seen by the late US political scientist Robert Dahl (Dahl and Shapiro, 2015 Dahl, 1961), as enlightened understanding and effective participation, where people have equal and effective opportunities for making their views known.

Of central importance to democracy therefore is access to relatively independent sources of information not under the control of the government or dominated by any other group or point of view (Dahl and Shapiro, 2015). Early twentieth century US political theorist John Dewey (1916/1946), conceived participation as requiring critical and inquisitive habits of mind, an inclination toward cooperation with others, and a feeling of public spiritedness and a desire to achieve ‘common good’, notions associated with philosophers Aristotle, Machiavelli, and Rousseau. Participation is interpreted differently by different democratic theories, which have diverse ideas about what should be considered participation and how much a citizen should participate, including in and through the media (Carpentier, 2007). The first way can be content-or decision-related; a micro-participation that enables the development of civic attitude or the second refers to ‘mediated participation in the public debate and for self-representation in the variety of public spaces that characterize the social’ leading to participation in society (Carpentier, 2011:67). This means questions about how citizens are getting information and engaging with media, and whose voice is being heard need to be examined within a greater understanding of democracy not just as political concept but also a social ideal (Honneth, 2007; Fraser, 2000; Dewey, 1946).

However, as discussed in Chapter One, media consolidation and digital fragmentation have reduced citizen access to many sources of local media, raising questions about the role of the free market. Information is being increasingly controlled by unregulated internet search engines and commercial priorities. At every level of governmental and social policy, and in many contexts of political and media discussion, neoliberalism can be used to convey a potent sense both of empowerment *and* policing, of autonomy *and* control (Thompson, 2007). The conception of audience as consumer is an important one here (Tracey, 1998; Scannell, 1989), with market liberals arguing it makes media more responsive (Murdoch, 1989), and that media regulation should be minimalised as it, among other influences, denies freedom (Curran, 2001).

This view is criticised for overlooking the growing gap between rich and poor and excessive power of concentrated wealth in policy-making (Haas, 2007; Golding and Murdock, 1989; Garnham, 1983; Barrett et al., 1979). However, the impact of the global 2008–2009 crisis has given rise to new scholarship that critiques neoliberalism’s influence on democracy (Couldry, 2010; Thaler and Sustein, 2008; Leadbeater, 2008; Honneth, 2007), and seeks developmental alternatives that examine democracy as social organisation. As media is at heart of political and social life, more therefore needs to be understood about how it might evolve too.

Media as the public sphere

Media is prioritised for facilitating or even constituting a public sphere ‘the realm of social life where the exchange of information and views on questions of common can take place so that public opinion can be formed’ (Dahlgren, 1995:7). Central to scholarship on the public sphere is the substantive work of Jürgen Habermas (1964, 1989/1997/2008), who used the German concept of *Öffentlichkeit*, literally meaning ‘openness’ but translated into English as ‘the public sphere’ to describe the social conditions whereby individuals can publicly discuss matters of society and governance. Informed by the way coffee houses and salons operated in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century Europe, it came to encapsulate ideas of deliberative democracy or a democratic political culture where the public is able to deliberate free of state interference (Kim et al., 1999; Benhabib, 1996; Cohen, 1996). Habermas (1997:105) described the ideal location for public discussion as occurring ‘in every conversation in which private persons come together to form a public’ where individuals are informed about matters of politics and society and can discuss these without threat of reprisal or coercion. This theory of communicative rationality between two individuals relies on the basis of a consensus regarding the validity claims raised by the speech acts they exchange. By way of definition, this thesis

approaches consensus as a form of decision making in which, after discussion, one or more members of the assembly sum up prevailing sentiment, and if no objections are voiced, this becomes agreed-on policy (Mansbridge, 1980:32).

The Habermasian approach, with its reliance on consensus, has been criticised for being utopian and idealistic (Calhoun, 1992 Foucault, 1988) and for being blind to issues of race, gender, sexuality, and social movements (Dean, 2003; Curran, 2002; Schlesinger, 2000; Schudson, 1998; Cohen, 1995; Thompson, 1993/1995; Fraser 1992/1990/1987; Ryan, 1992). Fundamentally, the historical constitution of the public sphere (Eley, 1992), ignores the role of conflict, contest, exclusion and structural inequalities (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). Radical democrats advocate communication environments which supports the right of citizens to the ‘full development and use’ of their capabilities (Downing et al., 2001:43-4; Macpherson, 1977:114). This articulation prioritises equality and encourages direct citizen participation in decision making, at all levels of society: ‘unless communication information is biased towards equality, they tend to enhance inequality’ (McChesney, 1999:288). Chapter Three will focus more in detail on the value of voice in these contexts.

Most media research is informed by the deliberative conception of the public sphere, conceived to be a ‘distinctive discursive space’ within which ‘individuals are combined so as to be able to assume a politically powerful force’ (Ernst, 1988:47). However, media and political processes falling short of the normative ideal. Face-to-face interactions idealised by Habermas, argues sociologist John Thompson, have given way to mediated publicness:

...The development of communication media has created new forms of interaction, new kinds of visibility and new networks of information diffusion in the modern world, all of which have altered the symbolic character of social life so profoundly that any comparison between mediated politics today and the theatrical practices of feudal courts is superficial at best’. (Thompson, 1995:75)

Thompson highlights how profoundly digital technologies have transformed the communication environment with social, economic, and political relations ‘lifted out’ of the local context of interaction (see also Castells, 2000; Giddens, 1990:21), as digital media, including radio, assembles audiences that are dispersed across time and in space (Dahlgren, 2005; Dahlberg, 2001).

However, it is my contention that does not render the Habermasian ideal entirely irrelevant. Interpersonal communication remains a fundamental building block of democracy, as William Greider (cited in Anderson et al., 1994:13) points out: ‘Strange as it seems in this day of mass communications, democracy still begins in human conversation.’ Radio, the focus of this thesis, provides the opportunity for such conversations to be broadcast and importantly, ways for others to interact with what is being said. Therefore, seeing journalism in the context of its practical relations and various interlocutors is necessary to better understand contemporary conceptions of the public sphere. As sociologist Craig Calhoun (1992), put it a quarter of a century ago: ‘The public define[s] its discourse as focusing on all matters of common concern [and] the emerging public establishe[s] itself as inclusive in principle’. This raises questions, still relevant today, about exactly what those matters of common concern are, how the public engages with them, how public engagement relates to political participation (if at all) and how important the media is in facilitating, shaping, or impeding such participation.

As private organisations became more powerful, particularly with the introduction of mass media, and the state became more influential in the private realm of citizen’s lives by the twentieth century, the public sphere underwent a transformation, what Habermas termed ‘refeudalisation’, of power whereby the illusions of the public sphere are maintained only to give sanction to the decisions of leaders and that relatively passive consumption of culture and the media became the norm (Mansell, 2010), in contrast to rational-critical debate (Habermas,

1964/ 1989/1996) with public opinion 'no longer a process of rational discourse but the results of publicity and social engineering in the media' (Dahlgren, 1991:4), and subject to public relations and entertainment (Finklestein, 2012; Curran et al., 2009; Brandenburg and Zalinski, 2007; Franklin, 2006/1997; Schudson, 2003:93). As media are used to create occasions for consumers to identify with the public positions or personas of others (Calhoun, 1992:26), people are engaging less and less with the critical discourse required for normative, egalitarian ideals of democracy.

Communication among citizens, experts and politicians was stressed by Dewey, who urged rethinking of democracy as a mode of social organisation orientated to providing recognition: 'Democracy is more than just government' (Dewey et al., 1993:110). Expanding on this, German social theorist Axel Honneth (2007) rejects the Habermasian standard of communicative rationality as applying social life, instead linking morality and ethics with democratic theory. He distinguishes multiple levels of recognition, among them the recognition of someone 'as a person whose capabilities are of constructive value to a concrete community' (2007:138). Social cooperation is emphasised in Honneth's approach to recognition by Fraser (2000), who wrote 'this involves establish[ing] [a] subordinated party as a full partner in social life, able to act with others as a peer (2000:114). Such divisions over the role and present condition of the public sphere, argue Luke Gregory and Brett Hutchins (2004:197), hinder the development of an adequate analytical and empirical framework with which to investigate public communication and decision making. This thesis is committed to understanding more about what practices and conditions assist local radio to orient communication towards mutual understanding and building public knowledge, including guarantees of freedom of access to the dialogue, equal rights to participate, truthfulness on the part of participants, and an absence of coercion in adopting positions (Habermas, 1993:31). If one of these criteria is violated, it jeopardises the authenticity of any consensus, as the communications behind it have fallen short

of enabling participants to assess the proposal on its argumentative merits (Vasilev, 2015).

Consensus, conflict, or both?

Consensus both serves, and threatens, democratic inclusion. In classical Athens, it was upheld as a primary virtue, with the citizenry acting with one mind seen to be contributing to the welfare of the city (Ober, 1989). Detractors of the ideal, including Plato, viewed agreement among the deliberating masses as a product of rhetorical cunning, whereby an ignorant crowd could be steered to a particular viewpoint (Sharples, 1994). While it provides the means for individuals to will in common, consensus demands one goes beyond self-interest to orient oneself to a common good (Bohman, 1998). Yet, where there is no agreement on the existence or nature of a problem, there will be no shared consciousness of a problem-solving need, and no impetus for the appearance of a problem-solving public (Bray, 2011).

Assimilatory pressures that marginalise perspectives differing from the prevailing point of view sometimes compel individuals to arrive at a common position through self-censorship and therefore give ground on their deepest commitments. Silencing or the imposition of such pressures to conform, run foul of the democratic objective to produce decisions that are reflective of the needs and concerns of all (Vasilev, 2015). Agonistic theorists argue democracies need to uphold conflict as an end in itself, rather than strive for the closure of a consensus as it nurtures an open-endedness in human relations necessary to secure freedom and the integrity of diverse actors (Moore, 2014; Mouffe, 2000), positioning adversarial democracy as more credibly advancing social inclusion. However, consensus retains its place within agonistic theory as it plays an indispensable function on diversity. Mouffe's layer of 'commonality' is necessary to bind together the radically plural polity she envisages (2000:55) and a 'culture of consensus' is more receptive to a society's spectrum of diversity as policy-

making relies upon winning the assent of actors outside one's own immediate political affiliations (Lijphart, 1998).

This thesis therefore adopts the view that conflict and consensus are not mutually exclusive and must, in fact, coexist for democratic inclusion. The distinctions between active and passive consensus, which involve public conformity *with* a conscious acceptance involving claim making or decision making. or *without* a conscious acceptance, implying indirect communication (Checkel, 2005; Loury, 1994), are relevant concepts to consider in my examination of voice and media facilitation of public discourse.

A larger question identified by American economist Glen Loury is whether the voicing of opinion in public forums permits a constructive and informative dialogue on matters of concern (Loury, 1994). Genuine moral discourse on difficult social issues, he said, can become impossible when the risks of upsetting some portion of one's audience are too great, forcing people to self-censorship. In conversational radio terms, this can mean passive consensus, by silence or failing to challenge the active consensus. This raises some important questions for consideration: are participants being treated respectfully? Are people being candid? Are some opinions being given privileged access?

Theoretical approaches to democratic theory and the role of the media, particularly the focus on participatory democracy (Pateman, 1970), highlight the paucity of any meaningful citizen participation by emphasising the intrinsic inadequacies of liberal institutions or focusing on 'essentialist', rather than sociological influences (Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm, 1963). With the expansion of commercial media, the concept of the free press escaped historic and restrictive political patronage (Tiffen, 1994:60), and became regarded, despite many ambiguities (Curran and Seaton 1991; Keane 1991), as having the capacity to assert the public's right to know. This 'Fourth Estate' conception of media freedom, however, is inappropriate in

today's landscape of powerful contemporary media oligopolies, networks and digital technologies. Their rising influence, argues US lawyer Yochai Benkler (2006), produce potentially transformative collaborations or a 'networked fourth estate' set of practices, organising models and technologies with non-journalistic media which do provide a check on governments. These new media participants include small for-profit media organisations, small non-profit media organisations, academia, and distributed networks of individuals participating in the media process alongside larger traditional organizations, like the not-for-profit online outlet *The Conversation*, an online publication which sources content from the academic and research community. What are perceived to be traditionally 'dominant' media practices and perspectives are increasingly challenged by non-traditional outlets such as Al Jazeera and Russia Today (RT), featuring distinctive and often competing ideological frameworks (McNair, 2016). Established media also co-exist with user-generated content on an increasing number of online outlets and the practices of the '*producers*' who make it (Bruns, 2006). Indeed, the term 'Fifth Estate' is used to describe this emerging new social and political phenomenon with the potential to challenge the influence of other more established bases of institutional authority and support the vitality of liberal democratic societies (Dutton, 2009).

Media: politically alienating or enabling?

As a key interest of this thesis is how local media can build public trust, considered to be an essential component of functioning democracy (Dahlgren, 2009), attention must now shift to media environments. Technological dynamism was identified more than two decades ago (Tiffen, 1994), as a chief barrier to enhance policy debate beyond reporting conflicts between the parties and most prominent pressure groups. However, the rise of social media and 'cultural chaos' (McNair, 2006) are seen to be producing new opportunities for journalism to allow for

‘dissent, openness and diversity rather than closure, exclusivity and ideological homogeneity’ (McNair, 2006:vii), with the media cast into roles of a mediator and/or representative of communities (a role which can help with community cohesion), and advocate of the public in campaigning terms (McNair, 2009), helping to challenge corporate and political control (Chen et al., 2014).

This is despite some contemporary research into the way news organisations use social media showing that it does not always provide the heralded opportunities for the audience to become more active in the news-creation process, with users rarely allowed to set the agenda and limited user participation on websites (Wahl-Jorgensen et al., 2016). Commentator Malcolm Gladwell posits that personal – rather than social – networked connections are what make a political and organisational difference and that social media makes it ‘easier for activists to express themselves and harder for that expression to have any impact’ (Gladwell, 2010).

To better understand more about who gets access to media at the local level and how journalists can better facilitate and build public trust, focus must shift to shifting news values. These were identified more than two decades ago by sociologist Herbert Gans (1979) to be supportive of the established hierarchy:

With some oversimplification, it would be fair to say that the news supports the social order of the public, business and professional, upper-middle-class, middle aged and white male sectors of society...In short when all other things are equal, the news pays most attention to and upholds the actions of elite individuals and elite institutions. (Gans, 1979:61)

Gans cited the location of journalists in the dominant order of a community, more representative of middle and upper classes, as critical to maintaining enduring news values of social order with impacts on what sources are used for reporting, and whose voice gets heard. It rarely results in the independent, investigative reporting associated with autonomous

journalism (Neilsen, 2015a), which highlights a clear need for more contemporary research exploring the practical dimensions of how news is produced, circulated and understood by actors on the ground in the local media ecosystem (Domingo and Le Cam, 2014; Firmstone and Coleman, 2014 Anderson, 2013).

At the international level, the split between those who see the media as politically alienating and others who see the media as encouraging greater political involvement, emerged in a content analysis study of television news and survey across eleven nations (Curran et al., 2014). It showed television news, in particular when produced by public service media, can be very effective in imparting information about public affairs and promoting a culture of democracy, but the views represented in public affairs news are overwhelmingly those of men and elites which can discourage identification with public life. According to James Curran and his colleagues:

...There are strong grounds for thinking that television news can contribute to a sense of powerlessness and political disconnection. We demonstrate that the image of public affairs that television projects is, to varying degrees, profoundly reverbrative. It is a world where men do most of the talking and where women marginalised. It is also a sphere where state and other elites dominate. (Curran et al., 2014:829)

These findings highlight media's power in creating political environments and public mood, reinforcing a need for greater diversity in, and by, the media to advance social and political change. The power of digital networks to advance social change is the focus of Brian McNair's more recent work, spreading messages from organisational structures (hierarchically structured), to peripheries and publics more rapidly and more viscerally (McNair, 2016a). A new element to the social dynamics of cultural and political power has been generated by the capacity of social networks to evade censorship and distribute information widely. Marshall

and Cole (2014), describe these ‘social identity groups’ as having the capacity to challenge even the most apparently stable structures. McNair (2016a), writes these challenges, on balance, operate as a force of good, leading to non-violent action against the bad ideas of governments, like the Pussy Riot movement after the feminist punk rock group in Russia was jailed in 2012 for protesting President Putin’s links to the Russian church. Social networks can also organise protests against autocracy, such as the Arab Spring, a series of anti-government protests, uprisings and armed rebellions that spread across the Middle East in early 2011. Yet McNair points out these social networks also facilitate the dissemination of bad ideas, like ISIS and can be used to inflict terror.

It is up to us all to challenge the efforts of both democratic and authoritarian states to return to a more controlled media and political environment and to realise the potential for constructive chaos and progressive change in the years and decades ahead. (McNair 2016a:170)

Despite the speed and ease of the new communications environment, McNair stresses that hierarchy, organisational discipline, and control are still required for ordered, systemic social change.

While the theory of public sphere liberalism may be undermined by a lack of engagement with the social and political order, particularly market-orientated structures of news media, its focus on public deliberation is worth further examination. Deliberation involves the social creation and change of meaning over time, seen as a process of political argumentation that proceeds through discursive give and take (Bohman, 1996). As Chapter Four will examine, deliberative processes entail the formation of associations between concepts within discourse and are intimately linked to framing effects. Among suggestions for public sphere-building journalism are civic forums (Norris, 2000), involving a wide plurality of political participants to sustain pluralistic political competition, and for media to facilitate the search for society-wide political

consensus by being universally accessible, inclusive (civil, objective, balanced and comprehensive) and thoughtfully discursive, not simply factual (Baker, 2002).

Functions of journalism

News journalism strengthens civic society (Schudson, 2008:24) by providing information, investigation, analysis, social empathy, public forum, mobilisation and publicising representative democracy. Some see the purpose of the news media to promote and indeed improve, and not merely report on and complain about, the quality of public or civic life (Glasser and Lee, 2002:203). Of particular interest to this inquiry into voice and access in local radio is one of the nine principles of journalism, as articulated by Tom Rosenthal and Bill Kovach; that of providing a public forum for criticism and compromise, guided by the same principles as the rest of journalism (Rosenthal and Kovach, 2007). In other words, journalists should work to make sure the forum is truthful, diverse and productive (Guzman, 2016).

However, journalism's virtual exclusive focus on the perspective of actors and elites (Curran et al., 2014), has been criticised for distancing news people 'from the concerns of ordinary citizens' (Haas 2007:303; Sambrook, 2016). Compared with the evidence on journalists' ideas about the features and purposes of their products, research on what the audience thinks about journalistic norms and roles for new production is scarce (van der Wurff and Schoenbach, 2014). The metaphor of 'watch dog' is commonly used to describe journalists (Marder, 1998:20; Coronel 2008:3), in relation to the pursuit of disclosures and investigative reporting. However, many journalists in the western world now see themselves as 'detached watchdogs' (Hanitzsch, 2011:485); not interventionist, but not uninvolved, articulating a 'skeptical and critical attitude towards the government and business elites' (Hanitzsch, 2011:485). This is credited as the most prototypical of western journalism but perceptions of the role of journalism

are blurring in the rapidly changing industry, particularly as the audience becomes more involved via social networks.

Participation communication culture makes changes in the values of journalism likely (Hujanen, 2016), as it challenges the socio-cultural rationale for professional control over content creation, filtering and distribution (Witschge, 2012; Dueze, 2007; Ryfe, 2009). Research in the Netherlands finds that the audience shares with journalists the notion that news media should have an independent and important function in modern democracies (van der Wurff and Schoenbach, 2014). A more appropriate canine metaphor for journalists, that of 'guard dog', emerged after years of extensive research in the United States (Donohue et al., 1995; Tichenor et al., 1980), suggesting that local news is deeply influenced by community structures, including politics and social structures like class and ethnicity. Journalists, they argue, serve groups which have some influence, power, and resources as they depend on them as sources and readers or advertisers. Therefore, whether journalists are 'guard dogs' or 'watch dogs' depends in part on local elite conflict and the media professional's ability and resources to effectively monitor people in positions of power (Nielsen, 2015a). Research into national journalism shows that it often turns out to provide the most diverse, revelatory, and multi-perspectival coverage of issues when political elites disagree (Bennett, 2005).

What does this tension between conflict and consensus mean in local media terms? Whether journalism happens on a local, state or national level, 'the story of journalism, on a day to day basis is the story of the interaction of reporters and officials' (Schudson, 1991:148), raising questions about power: who has it? Who is keeping check? With local media often well known in the territory, relations between politicians, public relations professionals, journalists and citizens can take place in observable time and space (Harrison, 2006; Schudson, 2003; Gans, 1980; Gieber, 1964). The influence of local politicians and business people can make for a more problematic environment due to local journalists' proximity to these interests (Richards,

2013). In some smaller communities, media managers are often closely linked to the wielders of power in their communities so it is the case that editorial pressure does occur (Epstein, 1973; Altheide, 1976).

What are today's journalists actually being paid to do?

The rise of PR and communication industries are key trends affecting journalism and media content (Putnam, 2000; McNair, 2013; Finklestein, 2012; Curran et al., 2009; Lewis et al., 2008), challenging any suggestion that journalism is the only profession involved in the creation and dissemination of news (Grueskin et al., 2011; Breit, 2011:8; Dahlgren, 2009). Every organisation could be classified as producing journalism if they have websites and a social media profile writes Margaret Simons (2012), but she makes an important distinction: 'Is the writer free to hunt out the evidence and publish what he finds? If the answer is yes, that's journalism; if it's no, that's something else' (Haigh, 2012).

Such complexity and confusion about journalism feeds into the bigger problem, discussed in Chapter One, of decreased public trust in politicians and the media. As this inquiry is seeking to understand more about the mechanisms and practices about media access at the local level, and how certain journalistic practices foster increased trust, this trend of decline needs closer examination. Australians' trust in news generally remains quite low compared to other countries, at forty-three percent with lower results for social media (Watkins et al., 2016). Perceptions of confused purpose are partly a factor in Australian journalists being held in low esteem (Roy Morgan Research, 2016). While eroding trust is not new (Hibberd, 2010; Blumler and Gurevitch, 2010/1995) it is getting worse (Endelman, 2017; McNair, 2013), with a high level of public disenchantment about the way politics is covered. This is an alarming trend as scholars define political information environments in terms of the supply of information about

public affairs routinely made available to, and used by people in a given locale and a given media context (Esser et al., 2014; Aalberg et al., 2010; Curran et al., 2009).

Theoretically, political knowledge and local media is regarded as a growing area of political communication as it can both inform people and mobilise them for civic and political involvement (Nielsen and Levy, 2010; Mastin, 2000; Campbell, 1999), develop trust (Aalberg and Curran, 2012; Warren, 1999), raise concerns about issues (Handel, 2016; Smith, 1987), and provide information about how people can participate in politics (Kim and Ball-Rokeach, 2006; Lemert, 1981). Research has shown that the more politically knowledgeable people are, the more likely they are to become actively involved in decisions regarding their communities (Dell Carpini and Keeter, 2004/2001/1996). US political philosopher William Galston suggests that ‘Competent democratic citizens need not be policy experts but there is a level of basic knowledge below which the ability to make a full range of reasoned civic judgments is impaired’ (Galston, 2001:3).

People are ‘fed up’ with politics (McNair, 2013a). It has become a sideshow with credible news and commentary ‘dumbed down’ amid rising news entertainment or infotainment (Tanner, 2011; Putnam, 2000; McNair, 2013; Lewis et al., 2008; Curran et al., 2009). In 2015, the politically liberal American online news aggregator, *The Huffington Post*, officially relegated coverage of flamboyant US Presidential candidate Donald Trump into its Entertainment section: ‘If you are interested in what The Donald has to say, you’ll find it next to our stories on the Kardashians and The Bachelorette (Grim and Shea, 2015). However, Trump managed to manoeuvre himself from joke candidate to become President, in part through his ability to bypass the mainstream media and speak directly to disaffected voters on social media. Media choice appears to have mesmerized many citizens, ‘distracting them from serious news genres and potentially acquiring important knowledge about public affairs’ (Cushion, 2012:37).

Brian McNair and a team of researchers at Queensland University of Technology are investigating people's perceptions about how effective the twenty-first century public sphere is in providing them with the information they need to make rational choices in elections by examining the forms of media in which politics is reported, analysed and discussed. The project, which is closely aligned to this inquiry, focuses on public participation media formats such as the ABC's *Q&A* program and talkback radio, where the public are physically present in the political debate and so able to make a contribution. Australian cultural studies scholar Graeme Turner writes that radio talkback provides space for audience members to share mini-narratives and to provide hyperlocal news (Turner, 2009:804). Despite more opportunities for participation for ordinary citizens, he suggests that 'one can't jump to the conclusion that a widening of access necessarily carries with a democratic politics' (2010:1). Talkback's most significant role, he suggests, is in the 'facilitation of a community conversation' (2009:417). Yet talkback in Australia has also been identified as a site of social exclusion and seen as negative for community formation (Fitzgerald and Housley, 2007; Kendrick, 2006; Barker, 1998). This will be discussed later in this chapter.

Findings of international surveys reveal deep disenchantment with journalists who are perceived as interfering with society's solving its problems, being more adversarial than necessary, focusing too much on the failings of public figures, not caring about the people they report on, and trying to cover up their mistakes (Kahut and Toth, 1998; Pew Research Centre, 1999/1998). Journalists too are very concerned about ethics, and believe that journalistic standards more generally are dropping, that there has been an increase in sensationalism, and that the credibility of journalism has decreased more generally (Hanusch, 2016/2015). However, at the local level, limited scholarly research about public perceptions of media reveals a different story.

2.3 Local journalism and social change

With the fragmentation of mass media channels and audiences, and the proliferation of new digital communication formats, it is difficult to draw sharp boundaries around discrete media spheres. As discussed in Chapter One, investigation of local news can be approached through assessment of local media ecosystems (see McKenzie, 2011 Janowitz, 1952), with the word ecology implying the study of environments created by technologies: their structure, content, and impact on people (Postman, 1970), and how proponents of actor network theory have expanded the view of networked actors to encompass technologies, objects, and human agents (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2015). This acknowledges that cities are not simply uncovered or exposed through communication but are products of communication; the urban space as construct is made present through the contextualising work of communication (Anderson et al., 2015). As Dewey observed back in 1916: ‘There is more than a verbal tie between the words common, community and communication’ (Dewey, 1916:5).

Empirical studies (Anderson et al., 2015; Anderson, 2013), sought to understand the ecological relationship between community and communication in a comparative review of two local media ecosystems in Leeds (UK), and Philadelphia (US). Researchers used a variety of methods, including content analysis of news stories, a representative survey of news consumers, a series of semi-structured interviews and focus groups to track stories through the news ecology and explore the political effects of local news circulation with the ‘small data’ (Couldry et al., 2013), finding local journalism was rated as more trustworthy and relevant than national media. Of particular interest to this inquiry into voice and access was the attention drawn to the crucial function of civic influencers; people who spread the messages of local news as part of their everyday interactions. Information and ideas from the media do not merely reflect the social world, but are also constitutive of it and are central to modern reflexivity (Nielsen, 2012; Castells, 2001/1996/1989; Hall, 1992b; Giddens, 1991; Gramsci,

1971). While there have always been social networks, the use of technology has helped create and sustain far-flung networks in which new kinds of social relationships are created. This concept of a 'network society' is associated with interpretation of the social implications of globalisation and the role of electronic communications technologies in society (Castells, 2004:3), and is influencing 'the way we produce, consume, manage, live and die' (Castells, 1989:15). Whereas society used to be based on the sharing of values and socialisation (Giddens, 1991:70), it is argued today's networks are built by the choices of strategies of social actors. This 'contrasting logic between timelessness, structured by the space of flows, and multiple, subordinated temporalities, associated with the space of places' (Castells, 1996:48), is creating problems in terms of traditional forms of citizenship, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

What is expected of local journalists anyway?

Local news media offers people a 'sense of place' that sets their locale apart from the seeming boundlessness and openness of the wider world (Hess, 2013; Hess and Waller, 2014). Community media scholar Kirsty Hess writes that news media have a privileged position in shaping and legitimating civic virtue under certain social conditions (Hess and Waller, 2014; Hess, 2013), expanding on Lippman's view (1997/1922), that coverage of aspects of daily life helps develop a sense of community through shared experience. Such common points of reference include coverage of local sports events which 'orient' people to their community (Janowitz, 1952), as much as national news media are viewed as being integral to the 'imagined communities' of nation-states (Anderson, 1983). Local media can create 'communicatively integrated communities' (Friedland, 2001), and increase not only information levels and political engagement but give people a sense of civic belonging (Kim and Ball-Rokeach, 2006).

These themes will be explored further in a review of local media formats and practices later in this chapter.

While local news is seen to cultivate consensus, coherence and stability within a community (Janowitz, 1952), there is a need for more research on how this is happening, particularly in terms of radio and its capacity for voice and access. Members of the American audience, interviewed about local news found it very important that news is accurate, unbiased, and presents a diversity of viewpoints (Wilnat and Weaver, 1998). Other studies have shown that US audiences more strongly support public journalism efforts of providing a community forum than the traditional roles of watchdog and reporting simultaneously (traditionally important to US journalists) (Heider, McCombs and Poindexter, 2009). Community expectations of local media go beyond the provision of news. Qualitative research with television audiences in the Netherlands suggests that people expect local media to, among other things, also foster social integration by helping navigate their local community and ensure representation of different groups in the community (Costera Meijer, 2010). Similar expectations were also highlighted in research led by US journalist and media scholar Paula Poindexter, finding people mostly expect local media to be ‘good neighbours’ (Poindexter et al., 2006), with journalists caring about the community, understanding and appreciating its values, reflecting its diversity and prioritise solutions as much as problems in their coverage. Some scholars suggest journalists should be inspired to have increased civic commitment to, and active participation in, democratic processes (Haas, 2007; Lemert, 1981). Solutions-based journalism is defined by media researcher Andrea Wenzel et al. (2016), as a way to explore responses to systemic social problems – critically examining problem-solving efforts that have the potential to scale in the assumption that a solutions news frame will encourage greater audience engagement. Following a community-based media project in South Los Angeles, Wenzel et al. (2016), held six focus groups with African, American, and Latino residents examining how participants

responded to the solutions journalism format. Participants suggested they would be more likely to seek out news and share stories if solutions journalism was more common, and many suggested these stories helped them envision a way to become personally involved in community problem-solving. This approach is in keeping with calls from media scholars like Gans, even before the advent of the internet, that the definitions of ‘newsworthiness’ be broadened to include solutions for the country’s problems – advanced by people outside the mainstream (Gans, 2010/1979). Digital editor Jonathon Stray writes in an online article that this reasserts the role of journalism as providing a place for public discussion, or moderating such a place not to propose solutions, but ‘to help a community come to a shared understanding of what its major problems are, which is the first and possibly hardest step in solving them’ (Stray, 2012). There will always be disagreement about priorities, conflict, about how to best to understand a problem, and even, whether there is consensus that certain things *are* problems (Bray, 2011). However, dealing in solutions also tends to move the journalist from informer to advocate, which is tricky territory (Stray, 2012). These broader conceptions of local journalism extend beyond how the media profession traditionally sees itself. It represents a communitarian supplement to liberal self-understanding, better aligned with what some community media is aiming to do (Dickens et al., 2014). From the appearance of the first Indigenous newspaper in 1836, community alliances have worked to produce a diversity of media alternatives in Australia that challenge ideas and assumptions about the world purveyed through the mainstream (Meadows et al., 2002). Community media, particularly radio, is viewed as catalyst for creating communities of interest and spaces for thousands of volunteers, establishing dialogue with audiences and community organisations, training future media workers, producing local content and challenging mainstream media perspectives on the world (Meadows et al., 2002). A study of community radio volunteers in Australia (including journalists), and a national qualitative audience study (Forde et al., 2005; Meadows et al.,

2007), found listeners to metropolitan and regional community radio stations tune in for four principal reasons: they perceive it to be accessible and approachable; they like the laid-back, ‘ordinary person’ station presentation style; they want to access local news and information; and they appreciate the diversity represented in station programming in terms, arguing that it is far more representative of Australian society than mainstream media (Meadows et al., 2007). However, some of these criteria are in parallel to ABC Radio’ strategic activity, which will be discussed in the Chapter Three. Recognising the central role that local news media play in providing such a sense of community, a survey by Moy et al. (2004), of 456 adults in Seattle USA found local news on television also enhances political knowledge (or at least the belief that one knows more) and promotes political engagement as defined by traditional acts of participation like voting, enhancing evaluations of the profession, contrary to popular claims (Bennett, 2016; Cook, Gronke and Ratcliff, 2000), that local television news provides little more than a superficial service. The data supports research that local media may enhance participation by not only providing information about where to go and be active (Haas, 2007; Lemert, 1981), but also instilling in audiences the sense that they need to be active to overcome the influence of untrustworthy media. The Seattle study also urged more research about the function of local media practitioners: ‘we also need to examine more closely how citizens view the media – as organisations, as journalists, or something else (Moy et al., 2004:545).

Industry in flux; impacts at the local level

Media organisations in Australia continue to cut jobs (Watkin and Dyer, 2017), as print circulation continues to decline and advertising revenue shifts online, with the impact being particularly felt in regional and rural areas (McNair, 2016b). Since 2011, more than 2500 journalist positions have been lost (MEAA, 2017), with 1,200 journalists departing the mainstream media in 2012 (Christensen, 2013). There have also been job losses in the Australian radio industry too as it adjusts after a merger between Macquarie Radio Network and Fairfax Media Limited. In 2014, the Federal Government also cut funding to Australia's two public broadcasters. The operating budget of the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), which has a mandate to provide multilingual and multicultural services, was reduced by twenty-five-point-two million dollars or one-point- seven percent over five years. The ABC lost two-hundred-and-fifty-four million dollars in government funding over the same year - a cut of four-point-six percent, prompting a major restructure. In March 2017, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation announced it would cut about 200 jobs before the end of the financial year with the plan to reinvest savings into a fifty-million-dollar content fund, aimed at expanding the organisation's reach and relevance (ABC, 2017a). Such cuts raise questions about the role of the 'quality' private press, its public interest functions, and capacity to deliver on societal expectations of the media as a check on wrongdoing (Buchanan, 2013), particularly as the contribution of local journalism to the functioning of a democratic society is seen by some scholars as taking on greater importance in the digital age (Harte et al., 2016; Neilsen, 2015; Kurpui et al., 2010; Friedland, 1996). Local journalists also exhibit much stronger support for the community forum and advocacy role (Hanusch, 2014). In a submission to the

Senate's Rural and Regional Bill Inquiry hearing, media lecturer Alex Lake said the impact of journalism job cuts is being experienced at the local level:

It has never been more important or more difficult in this country, but particularly in regional or remote areas to hold to account people and institutions whose functions impact social and political life. (Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications, 2015)

Lake stresses the importance of providing accountability place-based journalism. Cuts to the 160-year-old *Illawarra Mercury* in New South Wales in 2015 provide interesting insights about the potential impact of job losses and the erosion of local journalism. In May 2015, Fairfax Community media cut forty-six percent of its editorial workforce, despite the paper's crucial role in exposing corruption which has since been before the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC). Fewer journalistic staff, claims Paul Murphy from the media union, means a direct loss of local news reporting, particularly the vital role of scrutinising the powerful and holding them to account:

When you lose journalists in rural and regional Australia, quality journalism is undermined. Media organisations offer up homogenised filler where there is less local and therefore less relevant news. (MEAA, 2015)

Murphy's concern about the reduction of quality journalism in regional areas also applies to the contraction of suburban press in Australia, growing concern about the local 'news gap' between the information communities would ideally have access to, the information that is actually made available from independent sources of news (Currah 2009), and how relevant it is, as argued by Deakin University scholar Jane den Hollander:

While rural and regional Australians have access to more media than ever before in a digital world...they are receiving less news that is relevant to them at the local level. (Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications, 2016)

Despite such clear trends, contemporary research on the impact of the shrinkage of local news is limited. Most of the scholarly literature about the erosion of local news and information relates to the decline of local newspapers (Franklin, 2006; Finklestein, 2012), shown to be critical to local media ecosystems (Anderson, 2013; Pew Centre, 2010b). A study of US news media by journalist and media executive Steven Waldman concluded that technology and its effect on media business models had created a deficit in ‘accountability reporting’ particularly at a local level and this was likely to lead to ‘More government waste, more local corruption, less effective schools and other serious community problems’ (Waldman, 2011). Such findings were reinforced by case study research by Neilsen (2015a), in the Danish community of Naastved, showing the local paper informs two thirds of the region and feeds other media with local information, so its loss would dramatically alter the local political information environment: ‘The community would lose its only major source of relatively independent, ongoing and diverse coverage of local politics’ (Neilsen, 2015a:69).

In light of such research showing a loss of local media affecting community life, do people even care? Empirical research demonstrates they do (Blood, 2016; ACMA 2013), and a body of research from community radio audiences in Australia claims they are underserved by the mainstream when it comes to local news and information, expressing strong support for the community sector’s role (McNair Ingenuity, 2010; Meadows et al., 2007).

Part of the hunger for local content, it appears, is driven by what else is on offer. Media organisations are mostly commercial enterprises that offer a range of products that inform and

entertain their customers with a shift to what is described as ‘softer’, more entertainment-focused journalism (Reinemann, Stanyer, Legnante, and Scherr, 2012), or ‘dumbing down’ and the ‘tabloidisation’ of news (Davies, 2008; Schudson, 2003:93; Brandenburg and Zalinski, 2007; Postman, 2005). The term ‘newszak’ was famously used by British journalism scholar Bob Franklin to describe a raft of changes to the style and content of newspapers, including, ‘a retreat from investigative journalism and hard news to the preferred territory of ‘softer’ or ‘lighter’ stories (Reinemann, Stanyer, Legnante, and Scherr, 2012; Franklin, 2008:15)). These do create a form of public connection and therefore cannot be discounted as part of the discussion on media power, influence and public connection: ‘The media are the news media and function as journalism, but they are also the entertainment media to provide escape from the pressures of everyday life’ (Craig, 2004:3). Celebrities are part of this wider conception of public connection and are increasingly being used by politicians and interest groups to further political narratives as part of the general blurring between entertainment and news (Delli, Carpini, and Williams, 2001). Indeed, comparatively few studies have inquired into how journalists themselves are experiencing the changes in their work brought on by the technological, economic and cultural transformations. The 2016 Worlds of Journalism Study, an academically driven project that was founded to regularly assess the state of journalism throughout the world, shows most journalists don’t consider audience entertainment their job. A representative study of Australian journalists interviewed about their perceptions of change found many are concerned about an increase in sensationalism and a drop in journalistic standards and the credibility of journalism. Their most important role orientations are to report things as they are, to educate the audience, tell stories about the world, be detached observers and to let people express their views (Hanusch, 2016). Feeding into the decline in public trust, discussed in Chapter One, is the perception that the popularisation and collapse of journalism in Australia in the past decade has been at the expense of comprehensive coverage of politics

and current affairs (McNair, 2016; Gillies Smith, 2013; Harding-Smith, 2011). As digital disruption unravels many business models, more has been revealed about the extent of advertising influence (Finklestein, 2012). To test a hypothesis that market-based systems restrict the development the informed citizen by the delivery of ‘soft’ (entertainment-orientated news), rather than ‘hard’ (information-based news), Curran et al. (2009), conducted a major cross-national research project using quantitative analysis of broadcast and print sources in Britain, US, Finland, and Denmark. Tracing the connection between the architecture of public and private media systems and the delivery of news and citizen’s awareness of public affairs, they found public broadcasting gives greater attention of public affairs and international news, fostering greater knowledge of those fields than the market-based models (Curran et al., 2009:22), but continued deregulation of the broadcast media is likely, on balance, to lead to lower levels of civic knowledge. Whereas systematic large-scale content analysis has in several countries shown that local journalism on the whole is in fact both informative and wide-ranging (Franklin and Richardson, 2002), there is still a need for more scholarship on local news to help contextualise developments and make visible the various factors shaping those developments (Powers et al., 2015).

Local media source relations

Relationships between journalists and their sources needs to be a central focus in this investigation into whose voices are being heard, how public debate can be better facilitated and ways for media to rebuild public trust, especially as there is a growing trend towards the packaging of politics for media presentation and audiences/voter’s consumptions (Franklin, 2004; Cottle, 2003). Research has shown that local news coverage helps reduce government

corruption (Brunetti and Weder, 2003), and makes elected officials more responsive to their constituents (Snyder and Stromberg, 2010).

One of the ways professional journalists provide a plurality of perspectives on local life is to speak to numerous news sources to gather the raw materials of news, many of whom they go on to quote in their stories. However proactive reporting based on multiple sources and points of view makes up only a minority of local news and is mostly produced by newspapers, much less by broadcasters and weeklies (Lund, 2010; Pew Centre, 2010a). The deregulation of commercial radio in Australia in 1992 accelerated the move towards networking, posing questions like whether the audience can expect high-quality local services with a commitment to “fourth estate” values like honesty, integrity, and independence ‘in a local production environment where staff are regarded as primarily assemblers of material delivered from electronic sources?’ (Collingwood 1997:16). Adopting a broad and contemporary definition useful for this investigation, Stray (2015) describes a news source as more than the stories it produces; it is also the process of deciding what to cover, the delivery system, and the user experience. A number of empirical studies show news media provide privileged access to official sources such as government, police and the courts (see Hall et al., 1978; Gans, 1979), but the complexity of source-media interaction challenges this framework of primary definers (Kitzinger and Reilly, 1997; Schlesinger, 1990; Anderson, 1983), with non-official sources experiencing differing levels of access to news media (Manning, 2001; Anderson, 2000).

Understanding more about frameworks of influence and power is therefore central to discovering more about who gets access to local media and what conditions widen opportunities for voice and diversity. Civic officials tend to be the most frequently cited sources, with local businesses and community activists much less frequently, and ordinary citizens rarely making it into the news (Kannis, 1991; O’Neill and O’Connor, 2008). Public relations (PR) occupies a central position in the wide communications environment. It is

defined by communication scholar Simon Cottle as ‘the deliberate management of public image and information in pursuit of organisational interests’ (Cottle, 2003:3), intersecting with increasingly media-aware and ‘mediatised’ society where commercial interests and cultural identities seemly compete for media space and strategically mobilise forms of communicative power (Cottle, 2003:3). The activities of public relations professionals, news agencies and ‘spin doctors’ or ‘parajournalists’ (Schudson, 2003) help shape news content in national and local news media and is increasingly commonplace among journalists, academics, and public relations professionals (Davis, 2008; Manning, 2008; White and Hobsbawm, 2007). The extent of influence emerged in a study led by media scholar Justin Lewis and others in 2008 which analysed the domestic news content of UK national ‘quality’; newspapers (2207 items in the *Guardian*, *The Times*, *Independent*, *Daily Telegraph*, and the mid-market *Daily Mail*), and radio and television news reports (402 items broadcast by BBC Radio 4, BBC News, ITV News, and Sky News). Assessment of the influence of specific public relations materials and news agency copy across two week-long sample periods in 2006, found that journalists’ reliance on these news sources is extensive, raising significant questions about claims to journalistic independence (Lewis et al., 2008).

Public interest journalism

Members of the public have been unfairly characterized as voracious consumers of lousy journalism, writes political communication scholar Stephen Coleman, who argues they deserve better mechanisms of public deliberation and debate:

Contrary to condescending caricature, when citizens are exposed to a broad range of information and to one another’s diverse experiences, they tend to deliberate in ways that result in the rejection of the crudest policy options and the adoption of

thoughtful, nuanced, well-founded positions. For the media to serve the public interest, the public themselves must be at the centre of the debate about what that entails. (Coleman, 2012:11)

This vision from Coleman and others for more public participation and deliberation, ensuring the media acts more in the public interest, has spawned new media movements. In the late 1990s, New York University's Jay Rosen developed the movement of civic journalism, or the public journalism movement as it is sometimes referred to, to 'promote and indeed improve, and not merely report on and complain about, the quality of public or civic life' (Glasser and Lee, 2002:203). The movement was an attempt to abandon the notion that audiences and journalists are simply spectators in political and social processes, seeking to treat media consumers and community members as participants. One of its key objectives was to move away from a reliance on elite sources for stories, recognising the importance of 'ordinary people' in the newsgathering process (Haas and Steiner 2006). While it provides some fascinating and relevant insights into potential media practices as they relate to civic engagement and collaboration (Min, 2015; Rosen, 1994; Carey, 2008), critics accuse public journalists of abdicating their professional authority and responsibility for setting the news agenda (Glasser, 2000), and argue the pursuit of consensus suppresses awareness of conflicting interests among citizens, impedes deliberations, or even bolsters agendas that masquerade as representing the interests of all citizens (Hackett and Zhao, 1998).

A key feature of the public interest journalism movement, writes Tania Haas (2007), is the sponsorship of temporary and more permanent sites of deliberation and problem-solving, including round-table discussions, town hall meetings and local civic organisations, which rely upon journalists' ability and willingness to provide relevant information and a place for that information to be discussed and turned into democratic consent (Haas, 2007:159). An early example of a more collaborative approach to journalism in Australia was the ABC's experiment

in the 1960s, which involved a telephone survey and community forums in Queensland to gauge citizen concerns about their communities. Since then, live broadcasts on TV (like the ABC's *Q&A* television program), and radio forums, such as ABC Local Radio's *Community Conversation* series, strive to enable public interest concerns to be shared between citizens and government officials. Such collaborative experiments are valuable attempts, as Livingstone and Lunt put it, to establish 'new forms of relationship between experts and laity' (1994:131), and expand citizen access and participation with local media. How this happens on local radio is a key focus of this thesis, examining what journalistic practices help facilitate public debate and citizen participation in alternative and mainstream media formats.

Citizen journalism

Defining the difference between mainstream and alternative media is a complex task (Harcup, 2011), with Fuchs (2010), defining alternative media as critical media (in contrast to mainstream media, which are ideological), where the contents produced by grass-roots citizen journalists, often by the socially, culturally, and politically excluded (Coyer et al., 2007:3). Some definitions of citizen journalism also emphasise the independence from professional journalism – that producing a news product should be unpaid work (Nip, 2006) and others include the contribution to the community (Carpenter, 2010). Access to 'local news and information' remains a primary reason why people tune in to community radio in Australia, highlighting the importance of participation in 'citizen journalism' (Forde et al., 2005; Meadows, 2013). Initially, the 'citizen journalism' movement, defined in many, sometimes contradictory, ways (see Gillmor, 2004; Williams et al., 2011; Robinson and Deshano, 2011). It was initially identified with individual blogging but it today encompasses any user-generated content in local or global online reporting. A key function for citizen journalists is their ability

to post content about what is happening during events, to collaborate with mainstream media and to provide varied personal accounts, like eyewitness smartphone pictures and videos in the wake events like the London apartment fire in 2017. The audience is no longer a passive receiver of information, but rather an active co-creator or ‘active audience’ (Livingstone, 2004), with the public’s ability to engage with content creation a key area of literacy ‘crucial to the democratic agenda,’ positioning news media users ‘not merely as consumers but also citizens’ (2004:11). However, Nerone (2009), suggests that the profile of citizen journalism has been eclipsed as it did little to address the large-scale structural problems of the national press system, and these are the features that most compel critics and scholars now. The quality and integrity of citizen content is not always reliable, often producing content with superficial sourcing, on a narrower range of topics. Despite criticism of mainstream media, traditional outlets are actually more innovative in the providing interactive online content (Pew Research Centre, 2013).

Hyperlocal: at the heart of many collaborative projects

Hyperlocal output, discussed in Chapter One, is produced by a mixture of committed volunteers often in collaboration with entrepreneurial journalists who are driven by a desire to reflect and enhance the communities in which they work (Radcliffe, 2015; Kurpui et al., 2010). Data from the UK communications regulator, OfCom, from 2012 to 2015, shows UK hyperlocal audiences for community and local content matters are increasing, with the majority consuming it monthly (OfCom, 2015), despite earlier doubts about the quality and sustainability of such new local ventures (Pew Research Centre, 2013 Schaffer, 2012).

Yet business and editorial models change from community to community, from market to market, due to socio-economic indicators, multicultural, and age demographics. For many

hyperlocal practitioners, popularity with the audience is not a central motivation. Rather, the aim tends to be to provide engagement, civic impact and provide plurality of voice. Often it can be only appreciated by local audience members and, therefore, hard to quantify in terms of value, quality, and experience. Mike Rawlins (2012), who manages the website *PitsnPots at Stoke-on-Trent*, describes the aim of that community's hyperlocal site is to: 'make local democracy more accessible with a human voice' (Radcliffe, 2012). American practitioner, Mark Potts, who worked on the early hyperlocal initiative, *Backfence*, said it is often criticised as mundane: 'You bet it is – if you are an outsider looking. To members of the community who actually live with these local issues, it is vitally important' (Radcliffe, 2012). More than 500 online hyperlocal services have been identified in the UK (Radcliffe, 2016). Former chair of the Australia Press Council David Weisbrot says hyperlocal online publications are the fastest areas of media growth in Australia, at a time when governments are restricting access to information, fortifying secrecy laws, stifling whistle-blowers, and undermining the confidentiality of journalists' sources (*What Keeps Me Awake*, 2016). Hyperlocalism is, however, yet to decisively overcome challenges of funding and recognition by media regulators and policy-makers (Radcliffe, 2015).

Increasingly collaborative relationships between hyperlocal practitioners and mainstream media provide interesting insights into this inquiry's questions about how media can facilitate more nuanced debate and build public trust and social inclusion. The BBC is increasingly collaborating with hyperlocals in the embattled cause of public service news as part of wider efforts to 'ensure their (hyperlocals) strongest stories can be showcased on the BBC website' (BBC 2015). To better understand hyperlocal output, researchers from Birmingham City University and Cardiff University held 34 semi-structured interviews with producers. This largest content analysis of hyperlocal content to date showed the most popular subjects covered were local community activities (thirteen percent), followed by stories about local councils and

council services. This coverage of local government contrasts with the UK's mainstream local news media, which has scaled back its coverage of local politics in recent years (Williams, 2013:25).

There has been the expansion of 'professional-amateur' or 'pro-am' models of journalism involving amateurs who work with professional media staff to create content. In Australia, the ABC in 2007 started the now-defunct *ABC Pool* as a collaborative online media platform in association with various Australian tertiary institutions and members of the digital media community. Its former community manager, Jonathon Hutchinson, found increased co-creation does not necessarily result in increased affective outcomes for both users and institutions. He writes: 'It is the considered efforts of the intermediaries facilitating interactive content production that add value to the process' (Hutchison J, 2015:14). *ABC Open* is a contemporary online platform provided by the public broadcaster for user-generated content, enabling such collaboration in regional areas. A more established and successful example of collaborative media is *OhmyNews* in South Korea, which enables personal and democratic expression, yet the quality of output is inconsistent. New software and processes are also leading to some interesting experimentation and innovation in this field. Two US platforms of note are *Hearken*, an audience driven framework developed in the US enabling journalists to partner with the public through reporting, and *Listening Post*, a community media project that aims to start a conversation about local news in New Orleans. Since 2016, the *Hearken* platform has been used by the ABC for its *Curious City* project, which invites audience members to submit a question about their city or community for the ABC to investigate. The story is co-produced between journalists and the member of the public. This theme of an active, interactive audience is an important one and will be explored further in Chapter Three.

Digital journalism scholar Ian Hargraeves suggests that it would be helpful for researchers to shed the cumbersome hyperlocal label and focus more on how independent, community news

services across all platforms enrich the complex news ecology (Hargraeves, 2015). Internet radio and video offer abundant community potential but as the internet is colonised by state and corporate interests, limitations on the emerging communications environment, like hyperlocal sites, are imposed by the market and concentration of media ownership (Davidson, 2016; Sparks, 2006; Dahlberg, 2001). With the algorithms or ‘news bot’ software of Facebook and Google lacking accountability and transparency, there is growing unease about power of commercial agendas in news making and sharing. In what has been suggested as an editorial metaphor of the current times (Boaden, 2016; *What Keeps Me Awake*, 2016), Facebook in September 2016 removed a 1972 iconic image of Vietnam War from public view. Its technology censored the famous photo of nine-year-old Kim Phuc running with her brothers and cousins followed by the South Vietnamese army because the girl was naked and blocked by a porn filter (Ingram, 2016). Algorithms, unheralded and unseen, are silently transforming our lives (Halavais, 2013; Callahan, M 2017; Fisher, 2016), with news bots designed to amplify the reach of fake news (Shao et al., 2016), and exploit the vulnerabilities that stem from cognitive and social biases.

Blumler and Gurevitch (1995, 2010), wrote more than a decade ago that new interactive media has ‘vulnerable potential’ to enrich democracy and enhance public communications, but warned measures on institutions were needed to protect standards. This has not happened. British political scholar Timothy Garton Ash calls Facebook and Google ‘superpowers’, built exclusively on a profit model without the moral and legal mechanisms of accountability that exist for traditional media (Garton Ash, 2016). In the wake of the 2016 US presidential election, in which Facebook served as a vector for fake news and sensationalism and a force for ideological polarisation, CEO Mark Zuckerberg issued an online manifesto titled ‘Building Global Community’, recognising how deeply his technology influences its billion-plus users to read, communicate, organize themselves, and form ideas about themselves; and admitting

Facebook needs to focus more on ‘social infrastructure’. Critics contend the lack of transparency from Facebook and Google about their business practices pose some serious questions about potential economic, civic, and political impacts (Wardle, 2017; Thorsen, 2017; Bell, 2016; Bell et al., 2016; Garton Ash, 2016). Director of the Tow Centre for Digital Journalism, Emily Bell, writes that that understanding where these ‘clear trends are taking us ought to be a major policy issue, just as it is already a major business issue’ (Newman et al., 2015). In an online article titled ‘Facebook is eating the world’, she writes that changes to the media landscape, the public sphere and journalism industry are happening without the level of public debate it deserves.

We are seeing massive changes in control, and finance, putting the future of our publishing ecosystem into the hands of a few, who now control the destiny of many.
(Bell, 2016)

Bell warns these shifts are affecting economic and political power globally. The swift rise of ad-blocking software restricts plans by major mainstream media companies to offset declining revenue from print products by drawing traffic to their digital websites.

2.4 Civic and political engagement

In local communities – the civically engaged, those who volunteer, vote, and connect with those around them – play a key role in in community life (Adler and Goggin, 2005), so the way people stay informed about their communities carries extra weight and importance. There have been increasing calls for more research to see what impact the erosion of local media services may have on political engagement (Lewis and Wahl-Jorgensen, 2010; Schulhofer-Wohl and Garrido, 2009), as theoretical and empirical research links local news media with the powerful

potential to contribute to democratic and civic processes, particularly promoting active engagement with group life (Barthel et al., 2016; Putnam, 2000; Bellah et al., 1985).

Analysis of data from the Current Population Survey (CPS) conducted by the US Census, shows the closure of local newspapers in various American cities produced significant drops in civic engagement (Shaker, 2014). A study by Pew Research Centre shows local news habits are closely associated with voter turnout and political engagement (Barthel et al., 2016).

Indeed, conceptions of what constitutes public engagement or connection are deeply contested in the scholarly literature, notwithstanding the philosophical complexities of the word ‘public’, a term prevalent across political and political science theory, resonating with theories of participatory democracy which conceive the public sphere as a site where decisions and norms are collectively contested and redeemed with degrees of engagement (Coleman, 2014), ranging from a one-way flow of information from government (or other authority) to citizens to the ‘creation of citizens who are not only listened to through consultation, but empowered as partners in decision-making’ (Firmstone and Coleman, 2014). Digital platforms, write Carmit Wiesslitz and Tamar Ashuri, have facilitated the emergence of a new intermediaries of news and call this journalistic model, the model of the ‘moral journalist’. Unlike professional journalists who are committed to the norm of objectivity adopted by the institution they work for, non-professional online journalists can adopt different norms which allow them to beyond factual reporting and present their personal views and experiences about a reality they wish to change through their journalistic activity (Wiesslitz and Ashuri, 2011). Recent studies by Rojas et al. (2011:265), of communicative social capital find the interplay between personal networks, mass media, and political talk at the micro, meso, and macro levels, as well as the effects of these factors individually, build social capital, the very fabric of connections with each other. As argued by Putnam (2000), and others, social capital is both a ‘private good’ and a ‘public good’, necessary in democracies to facilitate collective engagement to address

society's shared challenges (Carson et al., 2016). Much of the debate about media's perceived negative role in political and civic connection focuses on social capital with pessimists viewing a decline in membership of civic networks as a precipitous drop in political engagement (Putnam et al., 2003).

Among scholars challenging the 'crisis' orthodoxy is McNair (2012), who contends a greater quantity of political information has come into mass media circulation, and political journalism is steadily more rigorous and effective in its criticism of elites, more accessible to the public, and more thorough in its coverage of the political process. However, Lippmann (1927), famously raised doubt about the capacity of citizens to get involved beyond more marginal roles. Public opinion, he argued, is expressed by occasional mobilisation of the majority against, or in support of, those who govern:

What the public does is not to express its opinions but to align itself for or against a proposal. If that theory is accepted, we must abandon the notion that democratic government can be the direct expression of the will of the people. We must abandon the notion that the people govern. (Lippman, 1927:51)

Lippman's pessimistic view of citizens' capacity to participate in the complex, social life of the community was famously defended by social democracy advocate, US political theorist John Dewey (1927). What is particularly interesting to this study is Dewey's insistence that journalists should do more than simply pass on information, that they should weigh the consequences of the policies being enacted.

Attracting and sustaining citizens' attention, a central challenge for modern democracies, is a prerequisite for most political and civic action. Etienne Wenger (1998), focuses on 'communities of practice' or people who share a concern or a passion for something they do, and learn how and contends that 'communities of practice' provide 'social configurations in

which our enterprises are defined as worth pursuing and our participation is recognisable as competence' (Wenger, 1998:5). Media scholars Nick Couldry, Sonia Livingstone, and Tim Markham (2007), write about 'action opportunities' for citizens to engage with and approach civil society as both including the space of media and allowing for a broader range of 'communities of practice'. Such deliberative phenomena offer the opportunities for democratic deepening (Cottle, 2002). Political philosopher James Bohman (2000), argues that the public deserves to have a wider role in relationship with media than currently exists. He believes regular interaction between citizens and media professionals is as important as regular interaction between citizens and politicians. Couldry et al. (2007), support Bohman's view 'to widen the circuit of influence over the means of communication'. Their analysis from the Public Connection Survey, which surveyed 1017 people in the UK in 2005, revealed a need for communities to have more input into local media.

Why should it not be normal for citizens to have the opportunity to attend public fora – not just in central locations but relatively near to where they live – communicate to media professionals their views about how media present public life? (Couldry et al., 2007:194)

The researchers' question about access to local media and public participation is central to the concerns of this inquiry. As the research project didn't take into account the rise of social networking sites, increased broadband in UK for user-generated content or the emergence of hyperlocal activity. What must also be considered in a more contemporary context are significant changes in what citizens expect from journalism. A large population survey in the Netherlands conducted by Richard van der Wurff and Klaus Schoenbach asked what the public expects from its news media and from the journalists working for those media in terms of journalistic roles and professional standards, and in terms of what news media should cover

(van der Wurff and Schoenbach (2014). Findings showed that very much like journalists, the audience has a more complex view of the roles of news media in society with researchers identifying there is considerable common ground for journalists and audiences to cooperate in shaping a better future for high-quality journalism.

UK scholar Stuart Allan's (2013) key concept of 'citizen witnessing' rethinks assumptions underlying traditional distinctions between the 'amateur' and the 'professional' journalist. His research focus on the spontaneous actions of ordinary people – caught-up in crisis events transpiring around them – participate in the making of news by engaging in unique forms of journalistic activity, generating firsthand reportage – eyewitness accounts, video footage, digital photographs, Tweets and blog posts. Allan considers citizen witnessing as a public service, showing how it can help to reinvigorate journalism's responsibilities within democratic cultures. Many have judged the media for keeping people at home and away from civic and community spaces (Putnam, 2000), distracting them with easy entertainment away from news and current affairs, commodifying news into branded infotainment and dumbing down journalistic value which 'undercut[s] the kind of public culture needed for a healthy democracy' (Dahlgren, 2003:151). The context for Putnam's 'Bowling Alone' thesis, however, is changing, with recent research (Lee and Lee, 2010) showing internet activity and participation in online communities can actually produces social capital affinity (sympathy marked by community of interest, and likeness based on weak ties).

A highly-publicised moment of democratic participation is voting in elections, an act compulsory in Australia. In the past decade, a trend that has been alarming scholars and observers (Coleman, 2005; Zukin et al., 2006; Dahlgren, 2009; Kellner, 2012) is that abstentions are most pronounced amongst the young – notably, the generation which has grown up with the internet. Life patterns and social frameworks have changed dramatically through

globalisation which disconnects the current generation with conventional indicators of engagement (Harris et.al, 2008) as young adult lives are geared more to individualisation. This change from allegiant towards assertive and critical citizenries across the globe, is mainly driven by younger cohorts that maintain a greater distance to authorities than older cohorts (Dalton & Shin, 2014; Nevitte, 2014; Welzel & Dalton, 2014). Younger generations are less prone to participate in traditional civic and political activities (Martin A, 2012) and are less willing to subscribe to the notion held by earlier generations that citizenship is a matter of duty and obligation (Bauman, 2000, Civics Expert Group, 1994; Phillips and Moroz, 1996; Krinks, 1999). They are less trusting of traditional political institutions than those who are older and support materialist values (Oser, 2016; Copeland, 2014). Young people see the media filled with inauthentic performances from officials staged by professional communication managers (Coleman, 2008).

Citizenship is often linked to the formal status of nationality but in theory, it encompasses participation in a just democratic and mutually supportive community (Marshall, 2001), some connections and networks between people and groups, and some norms and values that provide meaning to their lives (Janowski, 1998:24). Young people are less willing to subscribe to the notion held by earlier generations that citizenship is a matter of duty and obligation (Krinks, 1999; Phillips and Moroz, 1996; Civics Expert Group, 1994). Life patterns and social frameworks have changed dramatically through globalisation which disconnects the current generation with conventional indicators of engagement (Harris et.al, 2008) as young adult lives are geared more to individualisation, with public institutions seen to be less and less effective at drawing the concerns of individuals into the public sphere (Bauman, 2000).

More optimistic literature on social capital and public engagement with media is emerging from studies on collaborative media practices and the emergence of new civic networks (see Smart et al., 2000) such as volunteering, community service, or involvement in social networks

and associations (see Adler and Goggin, 2005). Utilising survey and interview methods, Australian researchers Anita Harris et al. (2008) found young people's political engagement is about having a say in the places and relationships that have an immediate impact on their wellbeing, informal networks, and places where they already feel comfortable, where they feel they belong, and where they believe that they have a good chance of being heard (Harris et al., 2008). Listening will be explored more fully in the next chapter.

Across print, broadcast, and digital, attention to local news has been found to influence civic engagement more broadly (Shah et al., 2001). Through a combination of local newsroom ethnography, social-network analysis and online archival research in Pennsylvania, C.W. Anderson (2013) investigated the current shifts in news production and found the making and diffusion of news depends upon personal actions, often connecting with degrees of 'savviness' on the part of entrepreneurial citizen. His research also highlighted that within the digital space, the line between person-to-person communication (or small group to small group communication) often shades into *journalistic* communication (Anderson, 2013). Interpersonal communication therefore appears to have a crucial and central role in the construction and subsequent movement of local news through the media ecology (Anderson et al., 2015) as across all platforms, audiences and media practitioners are forging new relationships with each other which has enormous potential for reinvigorating citizenship and community life, making individuals 'active agents in the process of meaning-making' (Deuze, 2006:66). Helping to create participatory spaces where citizens can deliberate about and act upon problems themselves, suggests media scholar Richard Harwood would be an important step for journalists away from elite deliberations (Harwood, 1991:67).

2.5 Conclusion

As this chapter has discussed, conceptions of democracy and local media are contested terrain, yet they are intertwined and powerfully connected. Contestation about the role and condition of the public sphere hinders the development of an adequate analytical framework to investigate how public communication currently operates, and to analyse the importance of local media. What the scholarly research does reveal is that convergent media operations have diminished the quantity, quality, and diversity of content at the local level, raising concerns about a growing local ‘news gap’ between the information communities would ideally have access to, and the information that is available from independent sources of news.

Coinciding with this – or arguably because of it – there is a charted decline in political and civic engagement, as individualism and consumerist culture gears life strategies more away from collective concerns. With the media viewed by many scholars as a contested site of social interaction and intervention, the impact of a rising focus on entertainment, PR-influenced media and political communication both enables and restricts opportunities for citizens to have their say, particularly as Google and Facebook use software to control social interaction, political information and business priorities. Ongoing questioning about traditional journalistic norms and practices may have led to new journalism practices, like collaborative projects like Hearken’s *Curious City* and conversational journalism approaches, which have developed from the public journalism movement, but more needs to be understood about how well equipped such approaches are to facilitate genuine dialogue and public participation. Opportunities to involve the audience in the creation of media content is expanding, particularly with the use of digital technologies. There are changing expectations of journalists and their profession too. Empirical research shows people want local journalists to contribute more than news and information to help create social cohesion and community identity. The perspectives of journalists themselves are shifting too, and must also be considered.

This thesis is focused on questions about whose voices get heard, how debate about matters of common interest can be better facilitated and what media needs to do to rebuild trust, and strengthen social ties. The review of scholarly literature thus far has revealed several gaps in knowledge about the relationship between local journalism, civic needs, voice, public participation, and social inclusion. While local news is shown to help cultivate a degree of consensus, coherence and stability within a community, there is limited research on how this is happening, particularly in terms of the medium of mainstream radio. What I am interested in knowing is how the practices of local journalism can influence political and civic engagement in this confronting era of profound media, social, political, and technological change. Interpersonal communications appear to have a crucial role in the construction and subsequent movement of local news through the media and more needs to be understood about ways this can be better facilitated.

It would be useful as well to understand more about how citizens engage with, and perceive, local media. Beyond opinion polls showing the public distrusts journalists, not much is known about what individuals think about the way politics is covered, represented, spoken, and written about. The literature highlights that more needs to be known about the socialisation and ideology of journalists at the local level, particularly how they may work with an ‘active audience’.

Public broadcasting radio is at heart of many local communities yet is relatively under-researched. A body of work from the community sector suggests the medium generates the type of audience trust and empowerment necessary for political and civic engagement. From the review of literature thus far, more analysis is required into what role local, public broadcasting radio has in providing the public with information they can trust, and the medium’s relationship with social cohesion and democratic polity. This will pursue two directions; investigation into the conception and contemporary priorities of public local

broadcasting, and a study of journalism practices. Source selection and interpersonal communication like face-to-face interaction and listening are therefore key areas of focus. The literature relating to such media practices and how they enable voice and diversity warrants closer examination. These themes will be the focus of the next chapter, Chapter Three.

CHAPTER THREE: RADIO AND PUBLIC BROADCASTING

3.1 Introduction

Key theoretical debates and empirical research reviewed in Chapter Two explored the ways in which media is central to conceptions of representative, liberal democracies. At the local level, media business, and journalism practices are being dramatically reshaped as Google and Facebook have morphed from technology companies to become publishers and distributors, having a major impact on the way people are connecting with each other, being informed and entertained. The shift is destroying traditional media businesses and audiences and public trust in media continues to decline. While audiences for television and newspapers are retreating, the medium of radio remains a leading choice for accessing news and more needs to be understood about its role in engaging with, and building, communities.

As noted by media theorist Marshall McLuhan in 1964, it was radio that first ‘shrank the world down to village size’ (McLuhan, 2001:334). Now, at a time when work, social and family lives are so deeply influenced by media interactivity, and networked communities, more needs to be known about the contemporary capacity of radio to identify matters of common interest and facilitate discussion about such issues.

Radio is popular because it is highly mobile and easy to consume, often while the listener is engaged with other activities (Starkey and Crisell, 2009). It has proven its resilience in responding to competition in the past, writes former journalist and UK radio scholar Guy Starkey, and ‘there is evidence in the ways in which it is adapting now to developing environment what suggest that resilience may again prove decisive in the future’ (Starkey, 2016:1). Radio brings communities together (UNESCO, 2017), and the creation of new

content formats and transmission alternatives like streaming, and digital products such as podcasts mean radio is continuing to build on what Castells (2001:32) described more than a decade ago as a 'renaissance'. In the US, radio continues to have strong weekly reach at ninety- three percent of all American adults surveyed by the prominent media and marketing company Nielsen in 2016. They listened on average more than five days a week (Washenko, 2017). Globally, more than ninety-five percent of the world's population uses radio. It is a low-cost medium, specifically suited to reach remote communities and vulnerable people: the illiterate, the disabled, women, youth, and the poor, while offering a platform to intervene in the public debate, irrespective of people's educational levels (UNESCO, 2012). Its participatory function also provides a sense of companionship and the opportunity for listeners to feel they can 'have a say or exercise their democratic rights' (Turner et al., 2006:109). As discussed in Chapter One, the right to use one's voice to influence state affairs and feature in institutional frameworks to enable extended participation in public and political decision-making processes is a hallmark of liberal democracy. The digital age means a brand-new age for radio, described by UK Radio scholar Andrew Dubber as the 'The New Mythic Age of Radio' (2013: 179). He writes that many radio professionals, radio amateurs, listeners and radio academics tend to focus on the past but by understanding radio in the digital age, they have the opportunity to apply its techniques, storytelling strengths, and its emancipatory potential for community participation and democracy in new ways. Audience behaviour has changed considerably through two stages of web development which affect radio communication: Web 1.0 (e-mail, forum, chat, SMS, online interviews, online surveys) and Web 2.0 (blogs, wikis, content voting systems, social networks like Facebook and Snapchat). Radio's operating model has moved from analogue transmission of local broadcasts to a specific geographic area, through to a multidimensional proposition, incorporating voice, live messaging, social media and online discussion across time, and across the world. This has

been partially prompted by the high uptake of smartphones and mobile devices, forcing public and commercial radio organisations to broaden their live and on-demand content offering and business practices to include services like listening apps, digital radio, podcasts and interactive social media services.

As discussed previously, the scramble for advertising revenue is transforming the commercial media sector, cutting jobs and changing services, particularly at the local level. Simultaneously, public broadcasters, funded by governments to deliver inclusive and diverse media practices to assist informed citizenry, are also facing significant funding pressures. Some critics (see Newman, 2017; Van Onselen, 2013; Horrie and Clarke, 1994) argue that the ABC and BBC have gone beyond the remit of their Charters with their activities, challenging the distinctiveness and purpose of public service media, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

In terms of scholarship, the medium of radio is, relative to other media, undertheorized (Starkey and Crisell, 2009). A lack of systematic analysis ‘besets radio broadcasting at international (external), national regional and local levels, in the public and private sectors’ (Gazi et al., 2009:19) as non-narrative forms of music and talk position it outside most scholarly research (Hilmes and Loviglio, 2002) despite sounds providing meaning as vivid and emotive as given images from visual media on a screen or on a page (Crisell, 1994:42). Dubber writes the medium continues in the digital age to ‘communicate ideas and images that create a kind of narrative by each individual listener’ (Dubber, 2013:101). Other methods to research radio, mainly used for marketing purposes, are broadly situated within the quantitative and qualitative paradigms, often involving psycho-graphic and geographic approaches (Gazi et al., 2009:17). Notable exceptions in Australia are an examination of the Brisbane market (Turner, 1996) and a Perth case study (Josephi et al., 2005). Yet at a time of contraction of local newspapers and more syndicated television programming, it appears that local radio is often central to creating

political knowledge by enabling or curbing forms of political conversation in Australia, with research from the community radio sector revealing high levels of audience trust in the medium (Carey, 1995; Bovee, 1999; Meadows, 2013).

Understanding more about participation is therefore important to advancing knowledge about radio, including how media practitioners can create environments and practices that facilitate interaction (Ewart and Ames, 2016). UK digital strategist Nic Newman and former BBC journalist (2011) notes that ‘the emergence of social networks and social discovery has added an extra layer of complexity to this ecosystem with the creation of new editorial and commercial dilemmas’ (Newman, 2011:56). Chapter Two examined how scholarly research is struggling to understand the civic impact emerging at the local level from the rapid and significant changes to media production and distribution models. This chapter will focus on radio and journalistic practices to equip a better understanding of what knowledge does exist, and then review the literature on voice, participation and inquiry. Scholarship and commentary about the role of public broadcasting and questions about its contemporary relevance and reach also need to be examined.

3.2 Radio in the digital age

Scholarly and industry conceptions of what constitutes radio are changing as systems of production and delivery, particularly through digital technologies, evolve towards an ‘on-demand’ and participatory media environment. As Dubber writes: ‘in the digital age, interestingness may trump aural wallpaper as a deliberate programming strategy’ (Dubber, 2013:52). No longer limited by schedules and timeslots, audiences can choose to listen to radio programs at times that suit them; listeners can skip, pause, or resume programs. Much is unknowable as radio is a distracting medium to which we often respond in an idiosyncratic or

inchoate manner: 'Listening to the radio is a cumulative, longitudinal experience. It is an expression of a habitual social relationship' (Fairchild, 2012:13). While radio is a highly popular source of entertainment and music, this research inquiry is confined to radio's production of spoken content and its role with civic engagement. Most people listen to 'gain information and because they appreciate conversations and arguments', not because they are socially deficient, as had been assumed in the past (Perse and Butler, 2005:218). In Australia, radio has always played a central role in the country's historical, political, and social life, particularly in connecting rural and regional communities (Simons et al., 2016; Lake, 2015; Turner, 2009). Talk radio, to be examined in more detail later in this section, is a form of talk-based programming that enables callers to contact the station and discuss, on air, topics proposed by hosts and is a unique form of public participation (Crider, 2012). Digital means radio stations can sound more local by, for example, incorporating local advertising in programs that are produced nationally. It facilitates connections between people (Perse and Butler, 2005), including those who might feel socially included (Ewart, 2011), or who are less mobile, or struggle with face-to-face communication (Armstrong and Rubin, 1989; Turow, 1974).

While radio has come to be defined by its programming and social uses rather than by its physical or technical properties, these features need definition before proceeding further. People 'listen' to the radio because the sounds made in one place can be transmitted to many other places through the use of electromagnetic radiation via dedicated terrestrial transmission networks (analogue radio AM or FM) or via coded numeric formats (digital radio DAB). Since 2004, there has been a rise in popularity for the flexible delivery of downloadable radio podcasts which are often episodic or part of a series of specialist content like sport, dramatic narrative, or talk-based radio. First commercialised by Guillermo Marconi in 1899, radio grew in its early years to become a dominant medium of mass communications with first commercial

licence was issued in Australia in 1922 to Charles MacLurcan for station 2CM, which broadcast classical music concerts from his family-owned Wentworth Hotel in Sydney. The first regular public radio broadcast in Australia went to air in 1923, on station 2SB (which later became 2BL, then ABC 702 in Sydney). Public and domestic radio sets encouraged communities of listeners gathered around a wireless box or radiogram. In 1932, the Prime Minister Joseph Lyons inaugurated the government-funded Australian Broadcasting Company, which soon became the Australian Broadcasting Commission (its name was changed to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in 1983). It initially controlled twelve stations with coverage in Rockhampton, Crystal Brook, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth, Hobart, Newcastle, and Corowa. After World War Two, radio fell from a position of media dominance with the rise of television and so adapted to the new media landscape by specialising in program content and formats like the industry practice of ‘day parts’ focusing on certain demographics. This practice is still evident. The early evening broadcast shift, for example, is known as *Drive* on ABC Local Radio and focuses on what listeners may need at that time of the day, like news, weather, and traffic updates. Formats are the apparatus that the industry develops to galvanize and differentiate potential and ‘give an audience a demographic shape’ (Tebbutt, 2006:861), refined to commodify specific audiences or represent certain organisational or social needs with some scholars (Bierig and Dimmick, 1979), arguing that the power of some formats can function as a substitute for face-to-face communication.

Interactivity

This thesis does not approach internet-based interactive activities, associated with radio, like texting or social media engagement as new phenomena, but rather the most recent in a long and varied history: ‘New practices do not so much flow directly from technologies that inspire them as they are improvised out of old practices that no longer work in new settings’ (Marvin, 1990:5). Considerable debate exists about how to properly conceptualise or operationalise the term interactivity (e.g. Heeter, 2000; Norman, 1988; Markus, 1990), with some using the concept to identify the inner workings of interactivity (Downes and McMillan, 2000; Coleman et al., 2008; Sohn et al., 2005). The confusion embedded in theoretical discussions raises issues for researchers (e.g. McMillan, 2000; Newhagen et al., 1995; Steuer, 1992; Heeter, 1989) about whether interactivity is a characteristic of the context in which messages are exchanged; is it strictly dependent upon the technology used in communication interactions (McLuhan and Fiore, 1967; McLuhan, 1964); or is it a perception in users’ minds (Simmons, 2009; Kioussis, 2002). One of the most cited scholars in this field, Rafaeli (1988/1993) identifies interactivity as being located in the relatedness of information exchange among participants, as Williams et al. (1988) see it: ‘the degree to which participants in a communication process have control over, and can exchange roles in, their mutual discourse’ (1988:10). Other scholars stress characteristics of ‘interpersonal communication’ (DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach, 1989:341), the extent to which the communicator and the audience are willing to facilitate each other’s communications needs (Ha and James, 1998:461) and the qualitative experience that users equate with interactivity (Burgoon et al., 2000). Australian media scholar, Gail Phillips, notes that not only does talkback make radio interactive by bringing the listener into the program, it also gives program-makers the chance to gain first-hand experience of who was actually out there and an opportunity for them to bond or belong (Phillips, 2007).

Interactive features of new media and talkback radio (Ewart and Ames, 2016; Lewis, 1997), also enable the receiver to be recognised as an active participant (Allan, 2013; Hall, 1980/1992a). A major characteristic of the active audience is that individuals have control over both presentation and content (Williams et al., 2011; Barak and Fisher, 1997; Tucker, 1990; Chesbro and Bonsall, 1989; Fredin et al., 1989;). Movement actors are viewed as signifying agents actively engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning for constituents, antagonists, and bystanders or observers (Snow and Benford, 1988) and are deeply embroiled, along with the media, local governments, and the state, in what has been referred to as ‘the politics of signification’ (Hall, 1982). A restriction on engagement with these media effects, argues Stuart Hall (1980, 1992a) and David Morley (1992), is that it must happen within the social and cultural contexts of the audience. Sociologists have understood for some time that social problems are ‘products of a process of collective definition’ (Hilgartner and Bosk, 1988) making media a site of social and political struggle, with audience members ‘having some control over how they engage or actively choose not to’ (Morley, 1992; Hall, 1982). A social problem exists ‘primarily in terms of how it is defined and conceived in a society’ (Blumler, 1971:300).

The public not only inhabits this new environment but also helps constitute the environment too: ‘we know that technology does not determine society: it is society’ (Castells, 2006:3). Interactive journalism research focuses on journalists engaged with audiences, not just in collaborative town-hall style forums or over the telephone but via a myriad of internet tools and social media (Ewart and Ames, 2016; Berry and Sobieraj 2011), yet the mainstream journalist retains substantial control as gatekeeper of that conversation (Briggs, 2010; Gould, 2009; Shirky, 2008; Gillmor, 2006).

Therefore, an influential method of understanding communication is an analysis of discourse to establish wider meanings. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) deals with consequences of

language use and social conditions (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997; Wodak, 2001) and emphasises the need to study language use as an inherently social phenomenon within specific cultural, historical, and interactional contexts. This approach, as a research method, will be discussed at length in the next chapter. From such a perspective, journalistic values and practices are constructed by drawing on discourse that have prior significations and that are socially available in a particular context (Hajanen, 2016). Such themes will be explored more fully later in this chapter.

Talk radio

While radio talk broadcasts are not an ideal arena for ‘undistorted communication’ (the type envisioned by Habermas and others), talk radio offers more potential for unstructured expression than in conventional media (Herbst, 1995), allowing spontaneous interaction between two or more people at the same time and providing an electronic public space with the potential to contribute to public deliberation in its own way (Mwesige, 2009; Brooks and Daniels, 2002; Herbst, 1995; Livingstone and Lunt, 1994). Chat-based programming, which is more orientated towards wit, humour and the personal also provides listeners with access to a public sphere, which is oriented differently and changing rapidly (Ames, 2016).

Talkback radio represents one of earlier reversals of the fact/opinion dichotomy of traditional news (McGregor and Browne in McGregor, 1996:24), creating a sense of community (Fitzgerald and Housley, 2007; Ewart and Dekker, 2013; Phillips, 2007; Herbst, 1995) and is conceptualised as a space where populist meta narratives are constructed and, through repetition, entrenched. Talkback radio can be enhanced by the unscripted speech of contributors and the attempts of presenters to deal with them (Chignell, 2009), contributing to radio’s intimacy and connection and highlighting the power of the discursive practices of live

radio's instantaneity and affect – a point of 'empowerment/disempowerment' for the audience, to use terms from philosopher Gilles Deleuze (Deleuze, 2004; Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). They both relate to irruption and immediacy and at this level, the audience body is a site of multiplicity of potential responses and the media the site of a range of possible provocations, as observed by John Hartley and Joshua Green in their case study research into the December 2005 'race riots' in Sydney (Hartley and Green, 2006). They found the role of mainstream media in reporting and commenting on extreme displays is in part to stage conflict so that the general public can think through cultural-political issues via the theatrics.

The power of the talkback host

Historically, the identity of talk radio in Australia is represented by the host, who incarnates the format while simultaneously carrying the broadcasting station's identity with encounters creating 'affective states' (Tebbutt, 2006:859). A decline in the availability of local news in an increasingly globalised news environment has coincided with the rise in prominence in populist styles of talkback radio (Turner, 2009). Radio listeners often form bonds with presenters who simultaneously act as a 'broker' with the more glamorous world of music and celebrity (Crisell, 1994:69). They seek to evoke affective, rather than rational, responses from audience members with listeners encouraged to analyse political and social issues in emotive terms (Gould, 2007), and often rely on 'the audience emotion generated rather than the persuasive and logical nature of the reasoning inherent in what is said' (McGregor, 1996:29). Prominent Adelaide host Jeremy Cordeaux, who was inducted into the Commercial Radio Hall of Fame in 2016, had previously dismissed talk back as a 'bit of entertainment' yet frequently referred to his own long-running program as the 'court of public opinion' (Gowing, 2006:12), and declared that '[talkback] is the most powerful court in the land' (Ahwan, 2006). Advertising can also

interfere with the listener's ability to distinguish between information and product promotion, as exposed in 1999 in what became known as the 'Cash for Comment' scandal featuring Sydney talk-radio host Alan Jones and others who were duplicitously accepting money to endorse products and companies without disclosing these agreements. A subsequent regulatory inquiry determined all radio announcers must declare commercial interests and called into question whether the commercial underpinnings of the industry compromise the ability of these stations to provide forthright and unfettered public service (Gould, 2007).

The power of radio has been used extensively, particularly politicians, as the top-down flow of communication format (Ward, 2002:21), allowing elites to gain 'unfiltered access to voters' to bolster existing terms of power rather than an 'enhancing (of) the sorts of practices necessary for the making of democratic citizens... (practices that require) the articulation of interests from below as well as above' (Kane, 1998:154). Australian media researcher Carolynne Lee (1997) observed John Faine's Mornings Program on 774 ABC Local Radio and conducted interviews with the program team, finding that while talkback offers opportunities for democratic processes, it is not completely unfiltered, and neither is it unstructured: 'There are ostensibly reasons for this: an unstructured free-for-all could easily end up as an unsatisfying experience for listeners, destroying the very rhetorical space it seeks to create' (Lee, 1997:278).

Production interference is accepted practice within the talk radio format by both presenters and listeners alike (Ewart, 2014/2011; Phillips 2007; Hutchby, 1996; Tolson, 1991). The necessity of moderating contributions needs to be balanced with the demands of the discourse-based conception of the 'rhetorical public sphere', defined by Hauser (1999) as a space 'in which individuals and groups associate to discuss matters of mutual importance, and where possible, to reach a common judgment around them. It is the locus of emergence of rhetorically salient meanings (Hauser, 1999:61), requiring certain qualities like tolerance, and suggesting that others' opinions need to be allowed to enter within the arena in order to maintain a vibrant

discourse (Hauser, 1999). This view aligns with research from the community radio sector discussed earlier in this chapter identifying trust as a key quality required to facilitate mediated public connection, as UK scholar Robert Picard observes: ‘Trust and trustworthiness are based in relationships, so the psychological and physical distance is poison to it’ (Picard, 2010:95).

Radio and community

The history of radio from the early pre-broadcasting period shows how transmitted music and talk have been caught up in the evolution of contemporary citizenship (Hartley and Notley, 2005; Hartley, 2000). Traditional talk radio, which allows interaction from listeners, is considered by Benedict Anderson as ‘an imagined community, enabling individuals to connect with each other in an indefinitely stretchable net of kinship’ (Anderson, 1983:7), forming a ‘community’ of listeners drawn a certain talkback host or particular program (Fitzgerald and Housley, 2007:153) and providing a form of social interaction (Australian Broadcasting Authority, 2003). These communities of listeners constitute a non-traditional social network that ‘produces informal pressure to conform to group norms’ (Barker, 1998:261).

During times of emergency, talkback radio has a unique ability to create a community: ‘creating a space in which listeners and callers felt included, even when others disagreed with their views, and through which they could engage with each other,’ even if they did not actively call the programs (Ewart and Dekker, 2013:377). Such bottom-up communicative activity is aligned with the use of social media by citizen journalists as discussed in Chapter One (however, it must be noted talk radio, with phone talkback, still provides a measure of access, control and editing). Its role in relation to local news provision is unclear (Ewart, 2014), though in the UK the expansion of local radio has led to talkback programs focusing on what Hutchby

(2001) called ‘civic news talk’ which is associated with everyday life. Dialogic talkback programs provide hyperlocal news through their audience’s sharing of stories in the talkback space and builds a positive sense of community and connection (Ewart, 2014:798).

As scholars have long tussled over the very nature of public life (Livingstone 2005; Sennet, 1992), the augmentation of social media activity to radio broadcasting further complicates, and even outdates many theoretical approaches. Despite radio audiences restructuring as communities of interest often linked around the globe through streaming radio, social media and music sharing sites like Spotify, there is strong empirical evidence that audiences still want to connect with local stations beyond passive listening. They want to feel that owners and managers have some connection to the local community (Hilliard and Keith, 2005:76), which is consistent with a volume of contemporary scholarly and industry research in Australia around ‘community broadcasting’ (see Hess and Waller, 2014; Meadows 2013; Hess, 2013; Ford, 2011). Research by the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia shows that five point three million Australians, or one in four, listen weekly to more than 450 community radio services (CBAA, 2017). Almost half of the listeners (forty-eight percent) connect with stations for local news and information, enabling public sphere activity and promoting a ‘public conversation’ (Bovee, 1999; Carey, 1995). Yet these democratic values of representation, and participation from the wider community in the production of radio are often at odds with the financial realities of keeping a station afloat. Community radio is required to operate on a not-for-profit basis and this fundamental requirement affects the whole operation of a station. While individual stations vary enormously in terms of their ability to produce local news and information, they have moved to embrace shifting definitions of such content in response to their audiences with social media communities like Facebook groups.

Before shifting onto the highly contested topic of what constitutes political conversation to assist this research into local radio and civic engagement, it is important to review concepts

underpinning media and public connection. Case study research by Firmstone and Coleman (2015) involving local media and a local council established three categories relevant to this inquiry. Building on Grossberg's (1987) conception of *empowerment*, the first considers engagement as a partnership between governing institutions and citizens through which the latter are empowered as partners in decision making. This is not common and requires citizens to take responsibility for their input into decision-making and to have considerable degree of control over technologies of interaction. The *informational* approach is partly inspired by the Shannon and Weaver's (1949) transmission communication model and is defined by terms such as 'imparting,' 'ending,' 'transmitting,' or 'giving information to others' (Guillemette, 1986). The third definition is more aimed at equipping citizens to have a *conversation* enabling citizens to contribute their views to policy processes from which they had been hitherto excluded: 'consultations where the public is encouraged to feel that they are able to 'have a say' with the expectation they will be listened to' (Firmstone and Coleman, 2015).

The researchers found that feedback, or at least some form of dialogical communication, is a key characteristic of successful consultative engagement. The potential of this on radio was first identified in the 1932 by playwright Bertholt Brecht, who spoke of the possibility for two-way democratic participation, where the medium would be 'capable not only of transmitting but receiving, of making the listener not only hear but also speak' (Brecht, 1932/1994). In the digital communications environment, distinctions between source and receiver are dissolving (see Steuer, 1992:77) with meaning actively constructed by both initiators and interpreters rather than simply 'transmitted'. Communication theorists now increasingly treat communication as a shared social system, as a series of 'publics' (see Grunig, 2008) with theoretical debate focusing more on agenda-setting and the formation of public opinion through the concepts of framing, social desirability, public relations and the political media. Agenda-setting theory describes the ability of the news media to influence the salience of topics on the

public agenda. Formally developed by Max McCombs and Donald Shaw in a study on the 1968 American presidential election (McCombs and Shaw, 1972), it cannot measure outcomes, such as whether it produces a more informed population or the organisational response of institutions to journalistic scrutiny.

Political conversation

Investigation into the nature of political conversation has been in part driven by political science scholarship on the importance of association memberships for civic engagement (Putnam, 2000), deliberative theories of democracy (Fishkin, 1991) and the role of social networks in political influence (Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1995). Current survey methods used for assessing the degree of exposure to political disagreement are less than fully adequate, calling into question current estimates regarding the ‘quality’ of political conversation (Mutz, 2006; Huckfeldt et al., 2004). Eveland et al. (2011) argue the body of research work on political conversation is, as a whole, somewhat narrow and too restrictive in its emphasis on individuals playing the role of citizens and there should be a greater emphasis on individuals functioning as communicators in relationships as dependency relations with the news, news exposure and participant in conversation clearly and positively related (De Boer and Velthuisen, 2001). Few surveys explicitly provide respondents a definition of what ‘political’ actually means (Eliasoph, 1998), presenting a serious measurement error problem if idiosyncratic definitions exist across respondents (Fowler, 1995). The lack of a clear definition, and some evidence indicating that individuals may not recognise political conversation even when they engage in it (Walsh, 2004:38), suggest the possibility of weak validity of measures of political conversation frequency with debate focused on effects, time, levels of motivation and disagreement within conversation (Mutz, 2006; Walsh, 2004; Huckfeldt, et al., 2004; Mansbridge, 1999). This thesis

adopts Kim et al.'s (1999) description of 'political conversation' as all kinds of political talk, discussion, or argument as long as they are voluntarily carried out by free citizens without any specific purpose or predetermined agenda.

As discussed in Chapter One, Carey (1992/1989) sees the true subject matter of journalism as the conversation the public is having with itself. He extensively quotes Dewey, Kenneth Burke, and Martin Heidegger on the importance of conversation in human society (see also Adam, 2009). Yet the lack of conceptual clarity around conversation frustrates debate about its power in democracy. For Carey (quoted in Rosen, 1994) 'a democratic life is a conversation' whereas for Schudson (1997) 'conversation is not the soul of democracy.' Schudson's critique of Carey is centred on the argument that if conversation is to have any bearings on democracy it should be heterogeneous and purposive (1997), that sociable talk and problem-solving talk are mutually exclusive. Life is not so narrow and mechanical. As Mainsbridge (1999) suggests 'the personal is the political', and conversation that crosses often sensitive political divides is most likely to take place through informal talk in the work place (Mutz and Mondak, 2006; Wyatt et al., 2000) despite the emphasis given to argumentation and formal deliberation by some normative theorists.

Locating the contexts and settings in which engagement about politics among 'regular citizens' occurs is the focus of Katherine Walsh (2004), whose work is aligned with Eliasoph (1998) and Gamson (1992). By using ethnographic and focus group methods, Walsh seeks to understand what happens when 'real people talk...in their own terms on their own turf' and finds: 'much political interaction occurs not among people who make a point to specifically talk about politics but emerges instead from the social processes of people chatting with each other' (2004:35). When compared with the narrow assumptions of the impact of mainstream journalism, community-level narratives and discussion are complex with 'local talk' seen as 'a powerful resource for understanding public opinion' (McCallum, 2007:27).

Relationship dynamics can affect political conversations as well as what people get out of those conversations, as Eveland et al. (2011) observe: ‘we suspect that deft interpersonal handling of serious political disagreement could lead to greater confidence in democratic approaches to governance as well as reduced ideological polarization and cynicism among the discussion partners’ (Eveland et al., 2011:197). Only a few studies have been able to thoroughly describe face-to-face political conversations in the ‘real world’ (Eliasoph, 1998; Walsh, 2004). News making in these contexts can therefore be considered in terms of being a collaboration between journalists and other sources, all working as ‘professional communicators’ (Breit, 2011) or in an ‘interpretative community’ (Zelizer, 1993) but the literature generally disregards aspects of interpersonal communication. After exploring the effects of digital worlds on human behaviour for three decades, psychologist Sherry Turkle emphasises the importance of people physically speaking with each other:

Face-to-face conversation is the most human and humanizing thing we do. Fully present to one another, we learn to listen. It’s where we develop the capacity for empathy. (Turkle, 2015:3)

Turkle’s argument is that instead of listening and developing empathy, public conversation formats are being undermined by the damaging distraction of email or text or Twitter or Facebook, which has impaired people’s ability to listen to alternative viewpoints and develop skills to argue or compromise: ‘what makes the physical so precious is that it supports continuity in a different way; it doesn’t come and go, and it binds people to it. You can’t just logout or drop off’(Turkle, 2015: 331).

3.3 Media practice and routines

Understanding more about how local journalists make decisions, intersect with the structures they work with (Bourdieu, 1998), and interact within more deliberative settings is necessary to explore the key questions of this thesis about who gets access to participate on local radio, the way it facilitates public debate and what mechanisms or practices it uses to build public trust. Even before the widespread use of the internet, research on the way that news reports are socially constructed indicated that journalists do not merely pass on information derived from news sources but, rather, shape this information according to certain news production routines (Harcup and O'Neill, 2016; Boyer, 2013; Josephi et al., 2005; Gans, 1979; Altheide, 1976/1978). In an increasingly competitive (Ehrlich, 1995), and commercially driven news environment (Altschull, 1997), the 'market mode of news discovery' is likely to prevail over the increasingly mythical 'journalist model of discovery' or perceptions of independence. In addition to organisational contexts (Cottle, 2003), personal and professional attitudes, ideologies and practices of journalists and their sources are recognised as significantly affecting news construction (Harcup and O'Neill, 2016; Dahlgren, 2005; Cottle, 2004; Schlesinger and Tumber, 1994; Schlesinger, 1991; Bennett et al., 1985). Online journalist Monica Guzman writes that as a more expressive public is presents new challenges to journalism, the profession must change:

Can our purpose be just to inform, when people are so adept at informing themselves? Can our purpose be just to report facts and context, when so much of what drives our society are the stories people tell each other, stories who army of journalists could never hope to find and report themselves? (Guzman, 2016)

These questions now confront the profession of journalism. Cultivating strong self-informing communities, she writes, is itself a form of journalism (Guzman, 2016), and meeting people in

the real world, argues Guzman, allows her to cover her community better. Journalists who recognise that issues are invariably multi-dimensional gain more satisfaction and credibility from their work than those who ‘opt to record the views of polar opposites without acknowledging that such an approach may well be excluding the majority, or a large chunk of people’ (Tanner et al., 2005:124).

What gets covered?

News access as an idea works well when dealing with questions about the relationship between news media and the public, because the idea of access is a suitable image to use with the metaphorical boundaries of the public sphere (Dahlgren, 2005; Thompson, 2005; Cottle, 2000; Hallin, 1994; Fraser, 1990). Hence it is important therefore to understand how issues are represented in the news, and interrogate why they are selected at all (Harcup and O’Neill, 2016/2001; Brighton and Foy, 2007; Harcup, 2009; Masterton, 1992; Galtung and Ruge, 1973). More than a decade ago, the journalistic selection process was described as ‘probably as important or perhaps sometimes more important than what “really happens”, when it comes to determining whether something becomes news’ (Westerhahl and Johansson, 1994:71). The emergence of social media and search engine software led Tony Harcup and Deidre O’Neill (2001), to revise their list of news values (Harcup and O’Neill, 2016). To do so, they drew on a content analysis of UK media, considering news selected by journalists and those stories most frequently shared on social media by audience which allowed some preliminary comparisons of notions of newsworthiness as decided by journalists and audiences. Whilst acknowledging that no taxonomy can ever explain everything, the updated set of news values highlights the influence of individual journalists and their organisations. Fluctuations were caused by practical considerations such as the availability of resources and time, and subjective, often

unconscious, influences, such as a mix of the social, educational, ideological, and cultural influences on journalists, as well as the environment in which they work, their position in the workplace hierarchy and the type of audience for whom journalists are producing news (Harcup and O'Neill, 2016). For online news, the pressure to obtain clicks and shares will also influence decisions about what news to select, as well as news treatment (Hujanen, 2016; Bell, 2015; Phillips, 2012; Thurman and Myllylahti, 2009).

Whoever is choosing news, for which organisation, and via what means, may well now be counted as influential as news values, and this needs further investigation. Journalists are socialised into professional and organisational norms (cf. Gieber and Johnson, 1961), and media hegemonists contend that bureaucratic organising procedures used by journalists are imbued with implicit and explicit ideological referents which consistently lead to the production of messages emphasising particular norms, values, and sanctions (Murdock and Golding, 1978). As mentioned at the start of Chapter Two, a key market liberal critique is that journalists have 'left-liberal biases' pitted against commercial agendas (Lichter 1990, Hackett and Zhao, 1998), despite contrary research findings (D'Alessio and Allen 2000; Johnstone et al. 1976). An important insight to theoretical debates about state theory is that actors (in this context, journalists) are the product of the mode of socialisation of a capitalist society which can be seen to pose limitations of state-based media agencies to counteract the broad direction of neoliberal politics:

Policymakers and politicians may therefore think of themselves as disinterestedly serving the common good, but their historical constitution as actors in a capitalist society makes it likely their epistemic framework will be biased in favour of capitalist interests. (Konings 2010:178).

This observation raises important broad questions about embedded institutional inequality and public authority. When it comes to changing media practices, digital editor Jonathon Stray, argues no media institution has the sort of argument-settling authority today to ensure journalism arrives at an objective truth that would be seen a legitimate by everyone: ‘Perhaps there is a need for a safe place to talk, in which you know the other, with real human moderators gently tending the conversation...To me this is a natural role for journalism’ (Stray, 2015). The discourses of professional news production, citizen debate and interactive news ‘producing’ were analysed in a study of audience participation in the Finnish print media (Hujanen, 2016), and indicated a nascent re-articulation of journalism’s values, including the logic of journalistic control: ‘Here, the discourse of professional news making intertwines with that of citizen debate: journalists’ ethical code of practice is represented as a requirement for debate’ (Hujanen, 2016:878). In addition to the values of journalism, other scholars argue that good faith and recognition are necessary conditions for an open and inclusive formative environment (Mansbridge, 2012; Endelman, 2001; Fraser, 2000; Honneth, 1995), operating within a value-system in which people are mutually esteeming each other’s forms of life and treated with respect (Mansbridge et al., 2012). Charles Taylor wrote that recognition is critical to identity: ‘Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being’ (1994:25). Therefore, recognition is integral to conceptions of voice, to be discussed later in this section, and involves ‘good faith’, an abstract and comprehensive term that encompasses a sincere belief or motive without any malice or the desire to defraud others, giving shape to minds and attitudes which is an indispensable component of a freely attained consensus, as people are not manipulated to a certain viewpoint (Vasilev, 2015:93). In an increasingly interactive environment, Yochai Benkler and Hellen Nissenbaum (2006), write that ‘commons-based peer-production’ entails virtues that are both ‘self-regarding’ (e.g., autonomy, independence, creativity), and ‘other-

regarding' (e.g., generosity, altruism, camaraderie, cooperation, civic virtue) (Benkler and Nissenbaum, 2006:13). This sense of security, built on mutual recognition, is fundamental to our capacity for social agency. For example, experiences of racism in Australia undermine the ability of migrants to feel 'at home', and hence their capacity to exist as citizens (Noble, 2005).

A race against time?

The reality of journalists' everyday working life is that they are dealing with opinions (Fisher, 2016), and managing ever-growing quantities of information in a 'fast-time' in a 24/7 news environment (Harcup and O'Neill, 2016), which has an impact on the distinctions and quality of output. Television is blamed for new forms of dumbing down, soundbites and talking 'experts' in self-referential circles, spreading superficial and 'received ideas' due to the restriction of time (Bourdieu, 1998). Patterns of limited fact checking were also noted in a study into Australian current affairs television (Turner, 2005). News journalism has come to be dominated by sedentary office-based screen work (such as gathering and processing information online). The capacity to deliver 'localism' is dependent, to some extent, on staffing levels – the more reporters on the beat, the more stories they can cover (Joseph et al., 2005). In a study of journalists at work, including at German public radio station, anthropologist Dominic Boyer (2013) challenges popular and scholarly images of journalists as roving truth-seekers, instead find them struggling to maintain their expertise and authority as they find their principles and skills profoundly challenged by ever more complex and fast-moving streams of information (Boyer, 2013). At the local level, studies in the UK (Fenton, 2011; Franklin, 2006), show that as revenues fall and staff are cut, workloads increase and this leads to journalists relying more on PR and official sources with only a very narrow range of sources routinely cited (O'Neill and O'Connor, 2008; Franklin, 1988). In their study on journalists in the north

of England, O'Neill and O'Connor (2008) found local and regional journalists rely heavily on a small range of sources, usually those with the most resources to devote to media relations and few members of the public or activists were cited at all (O'Neill and O'Connor, 2008:491). Former BBC Radio Director, Helen Boaden, who retired in October 2016 after three decades with the public broadcaster, said technology may have made journalists more enabled and liberated, but they need to be cautious about superficiality and speed.

We must use the technology to look upwards and outwards to explore and examine and explain. News will always be immediate. It is the nature of the beast. So, we still need to think fast – but we must also remember to think slow.
(Boaden, 2016)

Boaden's appeal in this online article for journalists to make greater effort to explain issues thoroughly takes time and resource, and that depends upon the values and priorities of media organisations they work for. The same year, Australian journalist and writer Waleed Aly lamented in a televised speech that journalism is being pressured by a quicker, superficial news cycle with more focus on performativity:

We've all seen examples where some kind of performed heated disagreement stands in for actual debate where people engaged each other's ideas rather than simply roll out their pre-determined talking points. What we are all witnessing there is a spectacle of 'duelling received ideas'. And it's hard to dream up an alternative because, to put it simply, a real debate takes time. (ABC, 2016b)

Aly stresses restrictions of time as a factor in determining who speaks and why. High pressure newsroom routines determine who is most likely to be heard: the easy-to-get-to and usually articulated 'authorized knowers' (Ericson et al., 1987:32) which puts minority groups at a

disadvantage (van Dijk, 2002; Poole, 2000). This returns to questions about the organisational priorities of media organisations, and indeed, those who work for them. Networked publics today are more sceptical. They are gaining the ability to identify valuable information and call out bad information, which in the end will likely prove more reliable than simply trusting mainstream media outlets and their professionals based on belief in the brand and the promise of objectivity (Russell, 2011:14). In a more participatory media culture, it is argued that transparency about approaches is gaining more importance as the public is more likely to engage and trust organisations that explain their newsroom decisions (Min, 2015). Both citizen and professional journalists should engage in the rituals of transparency by routinely disclosing their sources, demonstrating knowledge, explaining their methodologies and even openly sharing successful news-making processes with other organisations (Anderson et al. 2012).

3.4 Voice, participation, and diversity

If an essential feature of being human is having the ability to give an account of oneself, then voice is not a process but a human value with implications for justice, development and democracy, achieving its most concrete expression in the political sphere through the concept of citizenship and the right to participate in public life (Couldry, 2010:1). As Habermas writes: ‘the institutions of constitutional freedom are only worth as much as a population makes of them’ (1992:7). Stuart Hall and colleagues recognised the limitations of some ‘ordinary people’ with access to news and public discussion with their term ‘primary definers’ (Hall et al., 1978), which involves excluding others (Gans, 1980; Tuchman, 1978). Scholars point to significant cultural, political and cultural problems which emerge when citizens experience a lack or loss of voice (Weatherall, 2002; Husband, 2000; Butler, 1999; Tuchman, 1978:), failing the good faith and recognition criteria discussed in the previous section. The right to use one’s voice to

influence state affairs, and as a feature in institutional frameworks to enable extended participation in public and political decision-making processes, is a hallmark of liberal democracy: ‘rights...are practically enacted and realized through actual participation in the community’ (Hall and Held, 1989:175). Better decisions can result from wider participation and consultation and political skills acquired by individuals through participation helps them more fully realise their potential to effectively act as citizens (Richardson, 1983). Two experiments in Finland showed ‘ordinary people’ are able to form reasonable arguments and challenge official definitions of issues by drawing on their own narrative and stories (Kunelius and Renwall, 2010).

This body of evidence prompts a reconsideration of how media organisations should define and measure participation, seen by political scientist Mark Considine (1994), as requiring three types of action: facilitating rational deliberation; creating and communicating moral principles; and expressing personal and group affects and needs: ‘when all three forms of action are available, then participation provides a means for the creation of social capital from which all central democratic objectives spring’ (1994:130). Here is a challenge to media organisations to enrich ways of audience participation beyond clickbait and tweets, to improve the networks of relationships amongst citizens and enable society to function effectively (Kunelius and Renwall, 2010). In his analysis of the media strategies of politically marginal groups, Schlesinger (1990) found that much is revealed about institutional disadvantage and factors that favour access for more powerful as the sociology of voice has as its reference points ‘not just individuals but also the ‘landscape’ in which they speak and are, or are not, heard’ (Couldry, 2010:114). This raises questions about the form and attention of journalism provided to citizens’ voices as the public voice of journalists is usually restrained and defined (Kunelius and Renwall, 2010).

It was assumed that media ownership diversity had the capacity to produce voice diversity (Baker, 2006; Price and Weinberg, 1996). However, the liberalisation of ownership rules in support of a convergent, multi-channel environment also led to increased channel supply, structural concentration, cross-platform ownership and cross-media production (Deuze, 2008). Neoliberalism, writes Nick Couldry (2010/2006), means market functioning trumps all other social, political and economic values which actually suppresses voice, denying people the possibility of social co-operation and creating conditions of mutual antagonism.

Who gets to speak?

If we situate journalism as a key facilitator of the public sphere (Habermas, 1991), then the question needs to be asked: who speaks through the news? What voices get heard? How can journalists enable a more democratically viable public sphere? To analyse patterns of sources in this way is to focus on who has power or not (Cottle, 2001). This element of representation and access, write McNair et al. (2014), demands a level of public participation in the public sphere, as opposed to the passive reception of information. The access of publics to political elites is one way of providing accountability – of making the powerful stand before the governed and explain or defend their beliefs and actions. Pre-internet research (Gans, 1980) systematically examined domestic news as conceived, reported and transmitted by the major networks and weekly news magazines, stressing the need for multiperspectival news, to break the media's unwritten hegemony of values: less emphasis on government; more 'bottom-up' news on how policies affect citizens; and an increased commitment to representational news, gauging and reporting:

The relationship between sources and journalists resembles a dance, for sources seek access to journalists, and journalists seek access to sources. Although it takes two to tango, either sources or journalists can lead, but more often than not, sources do the leading. (Gans 1980:116)

Gan's description of the 'dance' between journalists and sources highlights the tension of the media-source relation underpinning contested power relationships in media and public discourse, affecting political and social change and producing hegemony. Drawing from Gramsci, Laclau and Mouffe, Norman Fairclough (1995:76/1992:92), explains hegemony as constructing alliances and integrating, rather than simply dominating, subordinate classes through concessions, physical force or through ideological means to win consent. This is done through discursive practice and discourse is itself a sphere of cultural hegemony and the hegemony of a 'group' over society or a group within it (Fairclough, 1995:94-95). In the past decade, the definition of 'elite' press as dominating hegemony has shifted from newspapers setting the global agenda (Cottle, 2006), to five major media conglomerates in the US (Bagdikian, 2004), namely Time Warner, Disney, Murdoch's News Corporation, Bertelsmann of Germany, and Viacom (formerly CBS). However, technology companies Google and Facebook now increasingly control access to content, with Facebook now the sixth most valuable public company in the world, and, as discussed earlier, not yet accountable to any editorial standards (Bell, 2016; Boaden, 2016).

Diversity

Napoli (1999) writes that diversity of source, content (e.g., Einstein, 2004), and exposure must all be considered, with policymakers tending to focus on either the diversity of sources or the diversity of content available to the public. Some contend policy should prioritise diversity and innovation, employment opportunities and localism when it is defined as contra-national and

access-orientated for those groups marginal to and disenfranchised by the dominant set of political and cultural codes and practices (Flew, 1997). The treatment of racial minorities is an interesting case in point. An Australian case study into the ethnic diversity of news showed that the modern business of media and the processes and practices of journalism impact on the nature of reportage in ways that can often disadvantage minority groups (Phillips and Tapsall, 2007). The examination of both the quality and quantity of TV news content over a two-week period showed that the characteristics of that particularly medium impact on the nature of the portrayal of people from diverse backgrounds, with dominant representations of ethnic minorities as ‘mad’, ‘bad’, ‘sad’ or ‘other’ (Phillips and Tapsall, 2007:15).

Research from the commercial television sector in Australia shows that as national networks replace the local audience with a national audience, they are disconnected from some of the ‘obligations for community service and accountability which had hitherto operated, no matter how imperfectly or contestably (Turner, 2005:9).

Increasing use of agency copy exacerbates a decline in news source diversity (Paterson, 2005), and coupled with trends towards personal online curation controlled by the algorithms of Facebook and Google, commentators argue this presents a narrow view of the world: ‘As individuals, we are worse off by ignoring our critics or those whose views aggravate us...as communities, this diminishes us’ (Gilmore, 2015). Others write that journalists should be subjected to some laws to ensure diversity as ‘the behaviour of journalists and editors cannot be ‘read off’ from the structures and ownership of their employers’ (Collins and Murrone, 1996:73).

While these are important considerations, they ignore a crucial question: What do audience members do with the media options they have? (Webster, 2009). Collaborative journalism has provided opportunities for increased diversity at all levels (Pew, 2015; McChesney and Picard,

2011; Dueze et al., 2007; Rafael and La Rose, 1993), but there is limited research to indicate whether the rise of civic and collaborative journalism is providing greater diversity in news commentary or original reporting. Online citizen journalism articles are more likely to feature a greater diversity of topics, information from outside sources and multimedia and interactive features (Carpenter, 2010). A comparison between online-only news sites and legacy media from six countries (the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, France, and Italy) also showed most online media reported in a diverse way, comprising multiple topics and actors (Humprecht and Büchel, 2013).

When media diversity and pluralism are conceptualised as only about consumer choice and competitors, communication scholar Des Freedman observes there is a ‘danger of neutering expansive concepts of diversity through neo liberal reforms’ (2008:77). As discussed in Chapter Two, Australia has one of the highest levels of media ownership concentration in the world which has led to networked programming, especially of news content, with an increasing supply of international news from corporate partners (McNair, 2016a; McNair and Swift, 2014; Gillies Smith, 2013; Harding-Smith, 2011). Many commentators argue the internet’s ‘information plenty’ is just another feature of neoliberal discourse with search engines creating echo chambers and controlling access (Nielsen and Ganter, 2017; Davidson, 2016; Bell et al., 2016; Boaden, 2016; Pariser, 2015; Halavais, 2013). Media organisations need to research and understand more about online echo chambers and find ways to counteract their efforts at and promote reflexivity (Sambrook, 2016). Amid mounting public concern about fake news and filters (which could eventually threaten the popularity and sustainability of Facebook), CEO Mark Zuckerberg recognised informed communities need a strong news industry:

Giving people a voice is not enough without having people dedicated to uncovering new information and analysing it. There is more we must do to support the news

industry to make this vital social function is sustainable – from growing local news, to developing formats best suited to mobile devices, to improving the range of business models news organisations rely on. (Zuckerberg, 2017)

Zuckerberg highlights the expansion of local news as a key approach to improve the social function of news uncovering and analysing a diversity information. While this could be perceived as a ploy to improve the reputation of Facebook, it does importantly recognise that some intervention is required to improve the health of journalism, particularly at the local level

Ways to protect the truth include suggestions for Google and Facebook to provide more information about the *sources* of news – such as how long they have existed. Another suggestion is for the companies to fund a radical market intervention – a new type of engine for independent journalism administered by a board of trustees (Bell, 2017).

One of the key features and democratic strengths of citizen and collaborative journalism, as discussed in Chapter Two, is that it allows local citizens, often using online tools, to report on topics that have been considered too narrow or without profit by traditional media outlets. However, Couldry argues news organisations should ensure that the views of the most marginalised social groups are articulated (Couldry, 2009:160), through more collaborative practices, for example, those at the Centre for Digital Story telling in Berkley, which collects digital stories like ‘conversational media’. These have consequences for the wider distribution of power in intensely mediated, but also often increasingly unequal, societies. Referencing the vision of Centre director Joe Lambert, Couldry contends ‘much of what we help people create would not easily stand alone as broadcast media, but, in the context of conversation, it can be extraordinarily powerful’ (Couldry, 2006:17). In order to restore voice to political life, scholars (Couldry 2010; Thaler and Sustain, 2008; Leadbeater, 2008; Honneth, 2007), draw on the vision of Dewey and Taylor to find different ways and methods of realising the voice of the people, enabling differences to be respected and common understandings articulated. As

discussed earlier, community radio is regarded as a participatory mechanism for conveying ‘truly independent voices’ (Foxwell-Norton et al., 2013:315), with the Australian Community Broadcasting Codes of Practice variously constructing community radio as being ‘inclusive’ representing ‘diversity’, ‘democracy’, ‘variety of viewpoints’ with ‘community involvement’ (CBAA, 2017; CRBCP, 2008). In this context, it is clear radio offers an important site, at the level of the local, where citizen and collaborative journalism practices might be explored (Forde et al., 2010).

Listening

While speaking and voice have long been assumed to be vital for agency and participation, the importance of ‘listening’ for democracy is now being increasingly examined (Turtle, 2015; Couldry, 2010; Dreher, 2012). Key elements of listening that are consistently described in scholarly literature give attention and recognition to others (Honneth, 2007; Husband, 2000; Bickford, 1996;), engaging in interpretation to try to understand what others have to say (Husband, 2000/1996), and ‘receiving and constructing meaning from spoken and/or non-verbal messages’ before responding in some way (Purdy and Borisoff, 1997:6; Lundsteen, 1979). Listening is also informed by Gadamer’s (1989) concept of openness, noting that as a prerequisite: ‘one must want to know’ what others have to say. He added that openness requires not only passive listening, but asking questions and allowing – even facilitating – others to ‘say something to us’, even when what they have to say may be against us (as cited in Craig and Muller, 2007:219).

Listening is usefully examined within the framework of Habermas’ (1987/1984) theory of communicative action, which affords identification of ‘communicative’ action in contrast with ‘strategic’ action that, either openly or in a concealed way, uses communication for persuasion

and even manipulation to serve organisational or power interests. Habermas (1992), wrote that ethical communication must include willingness among participants to try to understand others, consideration of others' as well as one's own interests, equal opportunity to express those interests, opportunity to argue against suggestions that may harm one's interest, and protection against 'closure' – i.e., shutting down discussion. This is useful for exploring contemporary social issues (Forester, 1985), in mass media institutions as they are situations which involve relations of control, authority and power (and possibly resistance) and they are actions which have an institutional 'place' in contemporary society.

A program of research collaboration in Australia, 'The Listening Project', has sought to foreground the role of listening in communication. Tanja Dreher argues for a 'dynamic conception of voice in which listening is clearly foregrounded, less our social policy and media practice entrench a partial promise of voice that is not adequately valued' (Dreher, 2012:157). With research on voice, listening and political conversation struggling to keep pace with the rate of social, technological change and evolution of journalism, more needs to be understood about media practices in live and interactive contexts, 'for situations in which the user modifies the content by providing feedback to the source in real time' (Straubhaar et al., 2013:26). It has been suggested that public service broadcasters could make more use of open, conversational platforms for engagement which have less to do with broadcasting and more to do with public media access and collaboration (Wall and Dubber, 2007).

3.5 Public broadcasting under pressure

Much scholarship argues public service media has an important role to bring public interest issues back onto the agenda (Murdock et al., 1992; Garnham, 1986), while others contend market and commercial values should be the superior regulator of the media (McChesney,

1997). Public broadcasting models were developed in response to the inherent weakness of the two dominant broadcasting systems; the state-controlled broadcasting model and the profit-orientated commercial model.

The launch of the BBC in Britain in the 1920s saw the advent of another conception of the public sphere; that of a national listening audience. The first Director-General of the BBC, John Reith, stated the BBC's mission was the 'inform, educate and entertain,' a catch phrase later rephrased by Holland (2003) to 'inform, educate and entertain in a way in which the private sector, if left unregulated would not do so' (Holland, 2003:7).

Public service, public sphere?

Much theoretical interest in the condition of public service media is generally within discourse about the condition of contemporary democracies and the public sphere (Cushion, 2012; Tanner, 2011; Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995;), and there are broadly two approaches for analysing and assessing the role of public service media in public life. Drawn principally from the work of Habermas, the first account suggests that there is an ideal form of public debate which, if it can find an institutional context, potentially allows equality of access and equal rights to all citizens. Habermas (1989:175) sees the triumph of the commercial broadcasting sector is causing the 'public sphere [to] assume advertising functions. The more it [the public sphere] can develop as a vehicle for... economic propaganda, the more it becomes unpolitical as a whole and pseudo-privatized'. As discussed in Chapter Two, the potential for a Habermasian public sphere exists in the consensus and commonalities which arise through the disinterested exchange of views, weakening traditional boundaries between groups – a position which is seen to restrict diversity, marginal and conflicting voices (Fraser, 1990).

This raises some key questions. Should public service media provide an institutional forum through access and participation programs which orchestrates critical opinion, and develop consensus between disinterested parties? Or should it be simply facilitating the expression of diverse interests, as radical democrats would have it (Mouffe, 2000; Curran, 1991), challenging established power to recognise the complexities of everyday life, providing more open, mediated communication between groups in society that may not achieve consensus but rather have other consequences like disputation, discussion and negotiation?

In all these conceptions of the public sphere a heavy burden is placed on dialogue, particularly when ‘people participate in more than one public’ (Fraser, 1990:70), and when these publics may overlap. Examination of normative theories with empirical research shows that both Habermas’ and Mouffe’s theories (despite their controversies) have value as critical perspectives on understanding the ideals of democratic public communication in the modern context. Of note is the conception of an oppositional public sphere described as ‘a type of public sphere which is changing and expanding, increasing the possibilities for public articulation of experience’ (Kluge et al., 1981-2:211), with what people have in common with each other as the basis for processes of social change. The sociological conditions of this public sphere are not those of disinterested contribution and access, but rather forms of mass communication: ‘A public sphere can be produced professionally only when you accept the degree of abstraction which is involved in carrying one piece of information to another place in society, when you establish lines of communication’ (Kluge et al., 1981-2:212).

Such an understanding provides an alternative to both the singular proliferation of private media outlets and the outmoded view of public broadcasting (Karppinen et al., 2008:13). In local contexts, Mann (1990) sees this emphasising the possibility for the negotiation of provisional unifying discourses in local spaces where a shared conception of community and joining action may have broken down, challenging public service media to set out a myriad of

communications entitlements: opinion entitlements for decision makers and influencers, and experience entitlements for program participants (Scannell, 1997:93). Even though some ideas embedded in the institutions of public service media are contestably out of step with the prevailing social and cultural principles of the times, the canon of public service media has to be constantly re-asserted (Rowland and Tracey, 1990). Some see its function to provide spaces to foster originality and innovation, and promote national, regional, and local identities, is now more urgent than ever (Barca, 2016; Dahlgren, 1999; McChesney, 1999; Hutchinson, 1999).

As a mixed system of broadcasting emerged in the UK, government funding for public broadcasting came under attack from market liberals, best illustrated by the relationship between the Thatcher government and the Murdoch-owned press in the 1980s (Horrie and Clarke, 1994). More recently, News Corporation greeted government plans for a BBC Charter overhaul with this advice: ‘For its own sake and the country’s, the BBC should emerge slimmer, more efficient, and more accountable to those who pay its bills’ (Greenslade, 2015).

Similar criticism has been levelled at the ABC, in particular its expansion into online and 24-hour news (Davidson, 2017) which is deemed by critics to be beyond its Charter remit: ‘In short, it has overstepped its *raison d’être*’ (Van Onselen, 2013). The priority of its digital communication focus to was formalised by changes to the ABC Charter in 2013 to support future operations and protect democratic health:

One of the hidden dangers of the digital revolution is that it is now possible for citizens to retreat into an electronic village and insulate themselves from any opinion with which they may disagree. The role of public broadcasters to promote social cohesion and provide a forum for debate in a democratic polity as a whole remains of critical importance. (ABC, 2013a:16)

This reassertion of the role of public broadcasting to promote social cohesion and provide a forum of democratic debate preceded major budget cuts to the ABC and SBS by the Liberal Coalition Government. While both broadcasters are independent of governmental control, board members are Federal Government appointed, often attracting criticism of certain political agendas (Grattan, 2014). The National Commission of Audit argued media convergence, especially the availability and access of text, audio and video media via the internet is eroding traditional arguments for public broadcasting: ‘It could be argued that the need for government intervention or support has now been superseded by technology or commercial imperatives’ (National Commission of Audit, 2014). Maurice Newman, chairman of the ABC Board between 2007 and 2011, writes that the case for taxpayer-funded media is getting thinner. He argues that as the quality and variety of media is so cheap and accessible and the decline of ABC TV and radio audiences is evidence of reduced distinctiveness and a lack of editorial curiosity or disposition, with free speech, free markets and rational economics receiving ‘short shrift’ (Newman, 2017). However, the specific place of public service media in democratic political cultures, write McNair et al. (2014), means the ABC and BBC provide participative opportunities to citizens with the presumed political impact of free-to-air channels, and their legal requirements of editorial impartiality, underpinning a variety of access formats intended to represent the public on air, and to give it voice. Over time, these formats have evolved to reflect changing expectations about what representation, access, and public participation mean (2014:8; Starkey, 2007). While the ABC does not preclude the lighter touch of commercial providers (McNair and Swift, 2014), it sets a context within which all serious journalism must be seen to be of comparable quality in terms of resource allocation and production standards. The proliferation of information has intensified the need and importance of journalistic work like verification and authentication.

Other commentators contend increasing commercialisation and privatisation of the broadcasting and telecommunications sectors combine ‘to comprehensively undermine the resources required for full and effective citizenship’ (Murdock and Golding, 1989:180). However, Jacka (2003) argues this mapping of discursive categories into institutional types runs the risk of downplaying or ignoring the contribution of commercial broadcasting services to media citizenship goals. There is also the risk, in equating ‘quality’ with ‘non-commercial’ media, of generating a dichotomy between popularity and ‘worthiness’ (Hawkins, 1999). Some public broadcasters have been forced to turn to introduce advertising to survive, which critics argue distracts from public purpose and mission. While the resilience of major broadcasters: the BBC, the Italian RAI, the ABC, and the Canadian CBC has been attributed to their preparedness embrace competition and commercialism, a study has also shown public broadcasters are losing their distinctiveness and purpose (Tracey and Padovani, 2003).

Adapting to the future

More than a decade ago, UNSECO’s Dr Abdul Waheed Khan called for dramatic reform of public service media: ‘reform it mightily so that it serves more directly as a purveyor of democratic ideals, helping to broaden horizons and enable people to understand themselves by better understanding the world and the others’ (Banerjee and Seneviratne, 2006:22). Yet responses from public broadcasters to changing technology have historically been reactive, defensive and pragmatic with recent research showing most European public service media services failing to adapt to the digital environment and in danger of losing touch with their audiences (Sehl, Cornia and Neilsen, 2016). Recent research, by European digital scholar Flavia Barca (2016), argues public broadcasters must legitimise their existence by launching a public debate on the meaning of public service and the common good in the twenty-first century

and, at the same time, become a trustworthy platform of high quality information to navigate and deal with the complexity of this transition.

If PSM lose their formative role, if they lose their mandate to cultivate a more critically-minded citizen, well informed and capable of interpreting increasingly complex networks of meaning, if they lose the capacity to question a whole host of media methods and languages, then what distinguishes the public service from all the others? How can the license fee be justified? (Barca, 2016)

Barca here raises critical questions about distinctiveness and purpose. While her research is focused on the challenges in Europe, there are relevant parallels to the Australian experience in the two key steps she recommends. The first step is to study and understand social changes and opportunities, and the consequent risks these pose for citizens and democracy. The second step is to identify new instruments and new spaces for listening, and for mediating a public debate that engages the productive and progressive forces of the country, from individual citizens and local communities to cultural and scientific communities (Barca, 2016).

For such a vision to become reality, public service broadcasting's role in shaping citizenship and understanding social change are key areas for inquiry. Barca (2016) argues the renewed function of public service media lies in providing a 'nudge' to welfare, social inclusion, identity and innovation. The theory of 'nudge' is linked to US behavioural economist Richard Thaler and legal scholar Cass Sunstein (2008), and links to any aspect of the choice architecture that alters people's behaviour in a predictable way without forbidding any options or significantly changing their economic incentives. It refers to means to justify and explain the role of the state, that is, as the purveyor of a new 'libertarian paternalism' that authorises the public role in domains where people can be helped to make better choices (Thaler and Sunstein, 2008).

Both ABC and BBC face criticism about their lack of diversity, both in terms of content and workforce composition. In 2013, an ABC spokesman said staff from non-English speaking backgrounds represented 12.7 percent of its workforce and a young producer at the ABC called Mohamed Taha told *The Australian*: ‘The ABC is incredibly white, incredibly homogenous and incredibly monocultural but, geographically ignorant as well...we need to see more diversity on our screen, we need to hear different voices and we need to see different names on opinion pieces and articles online to reflect Australia today’(Vatsikopolous, 2013). Such ‘cultural deprivation’ has made the ABC vulnerable, argues scholar Andrew Jakubowicz (Vatsikopolous, 2013), as it is becoming less relevant to a wider group of Australians. More needs to be understood about the role of media, links between media and ethnic communities and how it can develop solutions to increase visibility of ethnic representation (NEMBC, 2017). Speaking at National Ethnic and Multicultural Broadcasters’ Council (NEMBC) 2016 national conference, ABC Managing Director Michelle Guthrie said the ABC must work harder to accurately reflect and engage the Australian community:

...The imperative to embrace diversity amongst our staff, on our screens and behind our cameras and microphones is very clear. If the ABC is to remain relevant to audiences as we move towards 2020 and beyond, then the ABC must reflect the geographic, demographic and socio-economic differences. And, of course, ensuring the widest possible breadth of viewpoints in our programs and on-air personalities. (Guthrie, 2016b)

This stated commitment by Guthrie to improve delivery on the ABC Charter remit of diversity prioritises a culture of engagement and flexibility; embracing diversity in the workplace; and representing, engaging, and connecting with various communities (ABC, 2017b). In 2016, the ABC released its *Equity and Diversity Plan* to: ‘encourage a culture of diversity, engagement and flexibility. We embrace diversity in the workplace. We represent, connect and engage

communities' (*ABC* 2016c:2). It has identified corporate employment targets for consideration before December 2018, including fifty percent women Senior Executives, twenty percent women Technologists, fifteen percent non-English speaking background Senior Executives and up to twelve non-English speaking background content makers. There is also work being done with representatives of groups in the ABC's Audience and Content Strategy target audiences, focussing on generational diversity, regional communities and communities that reflect a range of cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic groups (*ABC*, 2016c).). Media commentator Rebecca Weisser argues the ABC Charter should actually be reworked to bring more views from the suburbs, regions, rural and remote Australian into its mainstreaming programming: '...the most important benefit of more pluralism at the ABC would be that it would force people of different political perspectives to work together, which would contribute to greater civility in the national conversation' (Weisser, 2013). In 2017, the ABC unveiled its biggest ever single investment in regional and remote Australia, dedicating fifteen million dollars each year to better enable the ABC to reflect the breadth of Australian life by boosting digital and video reporting capability, increasing coverage of local events and providing support for the ABC to work with regional communities to tell their distinctly Australian stories (*ABC*, 2017a). In the UK, BBC efforts to expand diversity, localism and pluralism are similarly focused on expanding Local Radio services:

...We are at the point where we need to reinforce our role as a companion – with presenters and output that will cheer you up as we involve you in local life. News remains at the heart of Local Radio. Holding individuals and institutions to account will become even more important as power is devolved. (Holdsworth, 2015)

With this commitment to rigorous local journalism and community connection, the BBC's Controller of English Regions, David Holdsworth, signals a distinct strategic shift – similar to

the ABC's regional focus – to not only provide companionship but prioritise localism and improved accountability measures. These have been identified as central to the practice of journalism and essential to democracy (Waldman, 2011; Harcup and O'Neill, 2016; Rosenthiel and Kovach, 2007; Galtung and Ruge, 1973; Harcup and O'Neill, 2001; Harcup and O'Neill, 2016; Masterton, 1992; McNair, 2009; Tiffen, 2004). Understanding more about the perceptions and experiences of those participating in activities described by Guthrie and Holdsworth would help establishing how it may contribute to establishing more informed citizenry on a local level. According to an Omnipoll survey conducted in 2016, eighty-six percent of Australians say the ABC provides a valuable service (ABC, 2016a), with the values of integrity, respect, collegiality and innovation the foundation of the ABC's activities (ABC, 2017b). However, the public verdict on the public service broadcasters will depend on whether they are perceived as allocating entitlements that are fair and sensitive, not patronising and partial (Banerjee and Seneiratne, 2006).

ABC Radio

ABC Radio with its six radio networks is integral to the ABC and its audience. Following the launch of ABC Regional Division in 2015, the ABC's eight capital-city radio stations focused on their value to metropolitan and suburban audiences while radio staff in 48 regional locations formed united teams with local news services. Average weekly reach in the five-city metropolitan markets (excluding Hobart and Darwin) for ABC Radio was 4.7 million people in 2015–16, down 19,000 listeners on the 2014-15 record (ABC, 2016a). Although it features some networked material like the *Overnights* program, the aim of Local Radio is to provide programming geared to the specific needs of individual regional and metropolitan audiences, giving listeners a break from hearing the voices of 'experts' and 'notable people' and has given voice to women and other marginalised groups (Turner, 2005). Audience interaction and

collaboration has been boosted by talkback, social media and digital interaction and radio programming initiatives like the ABC Local Radio Tasmania's *Community Conversation* series where people are physically, and virtually able, to contribute to the discussion. As discussed in Chapter Two, many of the ABC's Radio activities are in parallel with those in the community radio – among them; providing local news and information, ensuring regional and suburban voices are heard, and connecting with local communities through events and special broadcasts. Audience interaction and collaboration has been boosted by talkback, social media and digital interaction and radio programming initiatives like the ABC Local Radio Tasmania's *Community Conversation* series where people are physically, and virtually able, to contribute to the discussion.

3.6 Conclusion

It is clear that talk radio is a highly popular and accessible media with a key role to play in civic and political engagement. The medium is enjoying a 'renaissance' flourishing over the internet and is the most pervasive communication medium in the world. Technological change in radio is not dictating its use, rather the 'active audience' and potentially 'actualising citizens' help constitute the environment. Radio has the potential to create real and imagined communities around its content, and the impact of 'affect' generated by hosts is powerful. Such interactivity appears to be influenced by audience trust, tolerance and empowerment yet there is room for this to be better conceptualised through the qualitative experience of users, sources and media practitioners, particularly as recent research shows greater influence of individual journalists and media organisational structures (Harcup and O'Neill, 2016).

As a medium, talk radio remains relatively understudied, particularly in terms of interactivity and participation. The emergence of social networks and social discovery has added an extra layer of uncertainty about this ecosystem, and more can be understood about individuals' functioning as communicators as part of the news making process. Despite the growth in research interest in recent decades, the dynamism within the media environment means many questions about contemporary source relations remain unanswered. Yet the importance of whose voice gets heard and why, the sociology of voice and diversity, remain critically important factors in democratic polity. While speaking and voice are assumed to be vital for agency and participation, the importance of 'listening' warrants further examination.

Of major interest is how local radio is a site of social and political struggle. Empirical analysis of the media strategies of politically marginal groups reveals much about institutional disadvantage and factors that favour access for more powerful ones. The perspectives of the sources themselves in light of media change and journalists' own perceptions of the public value of their work provide further valuable opportunity for insights and contributions to understandings in this field, particularly useful given the ABC and BBC's recent shifts to boost localism and accountability measures.

While public broadcasting's mandate is to foster originality, promote social cohesion and provide localism, its role is under increasing pressure. Theoretically and in practical terms, there are tensions between ways it should facilitate citizens' participation. Access and voice are central themes to this inquiry.

What has emerged to date is that more inclusive conversation about matters of public interest is central to democratic polity, and may well lead to better informed individuals and local communities. There is a deluge of information, but it is increasingly difficult for audiences to know what to trust which raises broader questions about the functions of journalism. Whether

radio forums can help boost the social capital of a local community in the digital age by providing accountability, redress and reflecting diversity is to be tested. Identifying the key research questions to guide this inquiry and what research methods to use will therefore be the focus of Chapter Four.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH DESIGN

4.1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapters Two and Three, binary claims are often made in relation to democracy and local media engagement in the contemporary media environment; that citizen engagement is either in crisis or a state of reinvigorated renewal through new civic networks and activities. As local media contracts, opportunities to explore conflict, reach forms of consensus or deepen public knowledge diminish. Local radio is a key site of social and political struggle and is able to create real or imagined communities. However, more needs to be understood how its interaction with audiences and sources contributes to, or detracts from, voice, participation and diversity. Some key themes and silences have emerged from the review of scholarly literature which will now guide this investigation into how citizen engagement with local media practices can improve public discourse, how such political engagement can be better facilitated on radio, and why this matters to people and their communities.

As the review of scholarly literature and research in Chapters Two and Three demonstrate, there are gaps in contemporary knowledge and much is potentially at stake, as liberal democratic society is predicated on the principle that citizens should be able to inform and influence the processes and institutions that govern them. This inquiry is therefore a theoretical and empirical quest to discover more about the media's changing role in contemporary political, social and cultural life and the service of public service media.

Focus in this chapter shifts to how to address key research questions, identified by reviewing literature on citizens, local media, radio and public broadcasting. Given the speed and complexity of change transforming audience and citizen behaviour, the media industry and

professional practices, this is a daunting task. It is unsettling to know, as a professional journalist, that the finished work will not produce an ‘up-to-date’ story. However, the empirical study offers the potential to contribute worthwhile insights into industry practices and citizen engagement, contributing to research and, potentially, policy development. In order to realise some of those ambitions, this chapter must refine key research questions for investigation and then determine and elaborate methods of data collection.

4.2 Research purpose

As stated in Chapter One, this study is both an examination of the state of local media and citizenship in a dramatically transformed social and political environment, and an attempt to theoretically and empirically understand this in terms of contemporary media practices and civic and political engagement. Specifically, it aims to describe and better understand the powerful link between local public broadcasting radio and citizenship, through analysing the perspectives and experiences of media practitioners and sources.

This research is being conducted at a critical time for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). In 2014, it had its budget for the next five years cut by the Federal Government by \$254 million over the next five years, it needs to expand its reach and relevance and its functions are being challenged by commercial competitors and political critics. Audiences are fragmenting, faced with a wider choice of content on new and emerging technologies. However, as discussed in Chapter Two, contemporary research (mostly focused on local newspapers and hyperlocal sites) shows communities are keen for local content and expect more from their journalists than simply news, sport and weather. This research will be focused on radio, and provide critical insights from media professionals and sources, including how certain radio practices and routines best facilitate interaction and debate. The literature review

reveals a need for contemporary comparative scholarship about the important relationship between local journalism, civic needs, and social inclusion. While local news helps cultivate consensus, coherence and stability within a community, there is limited knowledge as to how this is happening, particularly in terms of radio and collaboration. What citizens even think about local media and their role in political conversation as communicators is not clearly understood. Despite voice and diversity being critical factors in a democratic polity, source media relations at the local level are not extensively understood beyond newsroom routines and there is little analysis on how sources regard the ways they are served by local media, particularly public service media in Australia.

Chapter Three focused on how the medium of talk radio and its enhanced interactivity is under-researched, with limited analysis on radio program-specific qualities of liveness, performativity and the extra layer of interaction radio now has with social networks and on-demand services. More needs to be understood about journalistic routines, including how content makers' decision-making abilities as agents intersect with the structures they work with, including the values and priorities of contemporary public broadcasters. Despite increasing interest, gaps in knowledge remain about media practices like listening, broadcast settings, recognition and listening. One way to explore these issues is to gauge journalists' own perceptions of the public value of their work as it can provide valuable insights and contributions to the scholarly literature in this field.

4.3 Research questions

After identifying gaps in the literature in Chapters Two and Three and established the broader context, I have formulated four research questions and interconnected focal points to achieve the aims of this thesis. These questions are:

- **RQ1: How can citizens be involved in local radio conversations, and why does it matter?**
- **RQ2: What journalistic and media practices improve public debate and political conversation on radio?**
- **RQ3: How can local radio better contribute to social cohesion and building public trust?**
- **RQ4. Can public broadcasting radio in the 21st Century improve democracy? If so, how?**

These questions should not be seen as exclusive. None can be viewed in isolation, as they are interconnected and linked to broader historical, cultural and political factors. Together they provide a productive frame for this investigation's aim to understand more about changing interactions between local radio and communities. A robust research methodology must be formulated to recognise this complexity and interactivity while unearthing data about the factors influencing local journalism, media practices and citizenship amid profound social and political change.

4.4 Finding a suitable approach

To explore the breadth of material under examination, a suitable research methodology is required; a way of thinking about, and studying, social reality (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Journalism operates in a complex web of causation and any study of journalistic impact must

seek to gain an understanding of this complexity, rather than attempting to oversimplify it (Simons, et al., 2016). Theories and research related to agenda-setting (McCombs and Shaw, 1972), show media effects are not limited to individual members or the mass audience, but also the impact on participants and their relationships and decisions. Indeed, the focus of thesis is complex and broad ranging as it seeks to understand more about how people gain access and are heard on local media, and what practices better facilitate public debate, build trust and social inclusion. Therefore, the complicated interplay between journalists, their sources and socio-political contexts requires a variety of research methods. Approaching the study of journalism through an ‘interdisciplinary lens’ follows calls from a number of scholars (Greer, 2010; Allan, 2004; Zelizer, 2004; Cottle, 2000). This eclectic but informed and reflective approach to media research is now widely encouraged for its ability to consider the contradictions and complexities of the industry (Lester, 2005). As Barbie Zelizer (2004:213) observes, there is no scholarly framework suitable to accommodate journalism’s ‘vagaries, downsides, and inconsistencies as easily as they address the more coherent dimensions of the journalistic world.’ She confronts the journalists’ ‘interpretative community’ and that of media scholars, noting the clash between the two.

As scholars invested in clarifying the phenomenon that we call journalism, we may have missed the mark. For in fine-tuning our analytical endeavours to the contours offered by a given disciplinary lens, we may have produced scholarship that obscures more than it clarifies and that by definition keeps its sights more on the premises of a given discipline than on the impulses underlying journalism, as contradictory and unclear as they might be. (Zelizer, 2004:205)

Zelizer highlights the limitations of academic scholarship as it applies research methods to the practices of journalism. Several of my research questions deal with contestation, media practices, representation, negotiation, and perception, as these emerged as key gaps in the

review of diverse literature about local media and citizenship. Such themes cannot be understood purely by what is heard or read, any analysis that relies solely on text is ‘an analysis of outcomes and of possibilities only and cannot grapple with the arguments above’ (Lester, 2005:81). This eliminates a more structured or formal technique of a questionnaire-based statistical survey which values the observers’ detachment from the object of research.

The investigation must place findings about media impact within the context of contemporary scholarly research. Media impact is defined as adaptive and reflexive and stratifies a variety of impact, namely; *reach*, paying attention to both audience numbers and to the different demographics within an audience (e.g., general public versus opinion leaders/decision makers); *engagement*: assessed on a sliding scale, from thinking about or being informed by a news story, through to sharing or discussing it, and culminating in civic action such as protest, and *relational*, capturing the social/institutional web in which journalism operates and its relationship to audience, including other institutions and businesses (Simons et al., 2016). The impact of news media on democracy, writes Richard Tofel (2013), can be cumulative, requiring the direct influence of public opinion through viewership or mass circulation over extended periods of time. Alternatively, a small but powerful readership or consumption could be enough to produce impact. From his study of the Gates Foundation, where changed outcomes could be directly attributed to the revelations of investigative journalism, Tofel concluded that media impact is different from reach, circulation or readership and there was ‘no single algorithm that can be devised, no magic formula to load into a spreadsheet or deploy in an app’ to measure it (Tofel, 2013:21). Indeed, the study of engagement and the civic impact of journalism has been conducted in the margins of research. It has had themes like social capital, or quantitative studies on media affects and agenda setting, as its main concerns (Simons et al., 2016; Zuckerman, 2014; Tofel, 2013; Zuckerman, 2011). To understand and respond to the multiple social and physical faces of human lives involved in local media, what is needed are methods

capable of exploring the complexity of human behaviour beyond the scope of positivist science (Denizen and Lincoln, 2011; Torrance, 2008; Johnson and Waterfield, 2004).

Audience research can present many benefits, including a better understanding of content reach and some insight into how ordinary viewers or readers construct meaning from specific texts (see Harrington, 2007). However, it is not appropriate for the research task at hand as it requires extensive data collection, which is complex, costly and beyond the scope of this project. Extremely limited audience insights are available from the results of Xtra Insights surveys (ABC, 2013b; Xtra insights, 2014/2016). The digital analytic tool *Webtrends*, used by the ABC, generated some limited quantitative data by tracking the number of clicks on links to audio and written content carried on the ABC station websites in Hobart and Northern Tasmania. However, the paucity of data relating to online engagement means there is no capacity to draw realistic conclusions about the impact of the programs in the community.

Despite audience-based research being discounted as an appropriate method, the richness offered by interviews is likely to generate useful insights, as they will provide data about relational practices. The research methods therefore will focus on assessing the *context* of a specific media intervention, the *mechanisms* of putting it together and the *outcomes*. Perhaps most relevant to the complex challenges of this inquiry are some recent initiatives used to study journalistic impact drawing on realistic evaluation, a methodology described by Margaret Simons et al. (2016) as the best way to understand inside the ‘black box’ (Astbury and Leeuw, 2010) of the impact of journalism on civic society and how it works. Drawing on the ideas of critical realism (Wright, 2011; Lau, 2004, 2012), realistic evaluation is a theory-based approach developed primarily to assess large social programs occurring in open systems such as towns or national societies (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). It offers a framework for understanding and explaining why and how things happen at the micro or meso level with criteria for a well-designed approach on the changing civic impacts of journalism, once new media impacts have

been stratified and conceptualised. Through qualitative case studies that firstly give precise and detailed attention to specifying the context, this approach (Carson et al., 2016) provides useful ways to describe the media environment and how reporting impacts on the main participants as well as on the public more broadly. Researchers write that early, place-based focused use of the realistic evaluation methodology has produced testable hypotheses around journalistic impact as it pertains to the effect of the internet and new media on regional towns in Australia.

In a realistic evaluation framework, context-methodology-outcome (CMO) configurations offer a promising method of limiting and framing the scope of research to be able to test multiple conceptualisations of how journalism operates in a civic sense. (Simons et al., 2016)

This research framework limits the scope of research, enabling the various conceptualisations of journalism's operation in a civic sense to be tested. What is particularly relevant about the realistic evaluation research methodology for journalism is how a mixed methods approach helps capture some of the complexity of situations in which interventions occur. This provides useful guidance to understanding the impact of local radio broadcasting on citizenship and public discourse.

Therefore, it is appropriate that a mixed methods research approach be considered for this thesis. It allows exploration of context, description of the media relational practices and ways to explore media impact, broadly following the context-methodology-outcome approach discussed earlier. This will produce an examination of what Allan (2004:3) describes as the 'messy complexities, and troublesome contradictions, which otherwise tend to be neatly swept under the conceptual carpet'. In order to produce such data, my study into local radio will rely upon these key research methods and processes:

- 1) Direct observation of broadcast case studies;
- 2) Analysis of media texts and other sources;
- 3) Interviews of sources, journalists and media managers.

These methods will be addressed more fully in the next section. The research design is also informed by the arguments advanced by Davis (2007), that when dealing with small groups of professionals, the most realistic methods ‘involve interviews, content analysis, participant *observation*, and the use of other survey data’ (Davis, 2007:185). Using this combination of methods and tools is an orthodox methodological approach that can produce well-substantiated conclusions (Clark et al., 2008; Lester, 2007). It also allows findings to be considered in the process of ‘triangulation’, leading to analytical enrichment (Deacon et al., 1999). Triangulation between methods (Hammersley, 2008) can be used to fact-check the validity of an interpretation; collect multiple accounts from different sources with no attempt to ascertain a single reality; seek complementary information; and to not only find different information but also to seek also a different worldview on the same object. Researchers should take care not to privilege one dataset or method over the other, such as using media texts as a baseline exploration before using interview data to ‘confirm’ what was determined in the initial analysis (Fürsich, 2009; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Instead, it is important to ensure that ‘the traffic between ethnography and textual analysis moves in two directions’ (Deacon et al., 1999:7). Triangulation also increases ‘the reliability and validity of findings by using several methods to illuminate the same phenomenon’ (Hansen and Machin, 2013:7).

Audience research can present many benefits including a better understanding of content reach and some insight into how ordinary viewers or readers construct meaning from specific texts (see Harrington, 2007) but a survey was not used here because of its inability to reflect the richness offered by interviews. Also discounted was the rather appropriately named method,

Conversation Analysis (CA), a research tradition that grew out of ethnomethodology, which studies the social organisation of ‘conversation’, or ‘talk-in-interaction’ by a detailed inspection of transcriptions made from such recordings (Ten Have, 2007). CA is designed to reveal the sequential features of talk, using a very restricted database, i.e., recordings of naturally occurring interactions which makes it unsuitable for the study of public radio exchange. At its most basic, this objective is one of describing the procedures by which conversationalists produce their own behavior and understand and deal with the behavior of others (Heritage and Atkinson, 1984). However, to explore the concerns of this thesis, talk needs to be placed in a broader context beyond its immediate setting or locale:

.. other sites and ways of constructing realities and establishing relations between groups of people, and these types also have a bearing on the sites of conversation.
(Alasuutari, 1995:105)

Although the term ‘discourse’ can denote a single or group of utterances or texts, it is more usefully defined as ‘language use’, with discourse analysis as ‘the study of talk and text in context (Van Dijk, 1997:3). As Norman Fairclough (2003:4) contends, ‘people not only act and organise in particular ways, they also represent their ways of acting and organising and production imaginary projects of new or alternative ways, in particular discourses’. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) and its suitability to this study of social conditions and consequences language use, was briefly discussed in Chapter Three and will be analysed further in the next section as an appropriate method for analysing data. Elements of agenda-setting theory concerned with media content are also relevant, involving examination of factors that lead to certain issues moving up or down the news agenda as well as the consideration and composition of news agendas (see Manning, 2001; Dearing and Rogers, 1996). Therefore, this thesis will explore media impact as a broad concept, going beyond reach and engagement, with focus on the relational practices and how users may be applying news and information in their personal

and civic lives (Clark, 2010). Before moving onto the more detailed discussion about the merits and weakness of each of the selected research methods, it must be noted there is still some distrust of qualitative research (Johnston and Waterfield, 2004), mainly due to a perception that such enquiry is unable to produce useful and valid findings (Munhall, 2012; Hammersley, 2007; Sandelowski, 1997). Yet news does not just happen (Hall, 1981). It is a series of decisions by journalists and editors who select, from the mass of potential news items, the events which constitute 'news' for any day, in part by some unstated and unstable criteria. Therefore, qualitative research as 'a form of social inquiry' looks at how individuals 'make sense of their experiences and the world in which they live' (Holloway and Wheeler, 2010:3). It is orientated to subjective perceptions inherent in human observations (Flick et al., 2004:9), primarily a cycle of 'shared activities and understandings' (Kitzinger and Barbour, 1999:18), where relationships between the researcher and the researched are potentially transformed to enable a more democratic process. Essentially, it is about shared responsibility, knowledge and power (Kitzinger and Barbour, 1999: 18). This approach is suitable to exploring key themes of voice and participation in radio broadcasting, allowing this researcher to hear the voices of those who are 'silenced, othered and marginalized by the dominant social order' (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2005:28/2010).

4.5 ABC Local Radio *Community Conversations*

To respond to the identified research questions, this thesis will focus on the interaction, professional practices and perceptions from media professionals and sources involved in radio forums conducted by the ABC in the island state of Tasmania. Supported by limited online and social media interaction, the hour-long forums, *Community Conversations*, aimed to involve citizens in a variety of issues, under broad topic titles. The topics were arrived at by a number

of ways. They were either perceived to be of local importance by journalists or prompted by non-ABC staff, or based on feedback from the audience via social media interaction, talkback, SMS, and meetings. The events are contemporary examples of journalism-as-conversation contestably consistent with ABC Radio's strategic goals to have a 'broader audience in every sense' and to have 'audiences working with us on their terms' (ABC, 2013b). The case studies provide opportunity to explore the value and potential impact of local public discourse or 'political' conversation, examine the experience of interactivity, community engagement, recognition, and participation, and identify how media practices can help or hinder voice critical for diversity, participation, and nuanced debate.

This thesis analyses data generated from three specific *Community Conversations* on ABC Local Radio in Tasmania on the 4 March, 19 March and 21 May 2013 on topics which had been recently featured in the local news in Tasmania: the campaign for more international university students to stimulate the local economy in the Northern Tasmanian city of Launceston, disability support in schools and tensions over the development of heritage buildings. These events were primarily selected for the diversity of broader social, political, and cultural topics guiding the discussions. Two *Community Conversations* were selected from a metropolitan market (936 ABC Hobart), and one from a regional market (ABC Northern Tasmania) to broaden the range of participants involved, and to see if any particular trends or distinct differences emerged from these different demographic settings. My interpretative studies of these events are interested in drawing wider conclusions, a process described by Carey (1975:190) as 'gingerly reaching out to the full relations within a culture or a total way of life.'

The special hour-long broadcasts were held as part of ABC *Drive* programs (4-6pm weekdays) in Tasmania which has been shown by radio surveys in 2014 and 2016 to reach approximately a fifth of the population, or approximately one hundred thousand people. These are the only

market analyses available at the time of writing. Fieldwork research by Xtra Research in October 2014 showed 936 ABC Hobart, hosted by Louise Saunders, dominated the radio market with an overall weekly reach of 34.4% and 23.4% in *Drive* (Xtra, 2014). In the north of the state, ABC Northern Tasmania also lead the market, with a total of thirty-five-point five percent weekly reach and 20.2% in *Drive* with Damien Brown (ABC, 2013c). These *Community Conversations* were held away from standard broadcast radio studio settings and included at least five participants linked in some way to the issue. Source selection, relational practices and broadcast settings are therefore key focuses of this research.

While the definition of case study research is contentious, a useful clarification for its applicability for this project is provided by Creswell (2012), Swanborn (2010) and Yin (2011), who see it is the study of a particular issue examined through one or more cases within a ‘bonded system’ such as a setting or context. Case study is identified as ‘both a process of inquiry about the case the product of that inquiry’ (Stake, 2008:121), employed to obtain knowledge of contextual phenomena about a person, a social group, an organisation, or political event (Yin, 2011/2004; Langford, 2001). This thesis, through case studies may provide better ‘human knowledge’ and its ‘meaning in the complex social, physical and situational real world’ (Mills et al., 2010; Luck et al., 2006), and aims to provide better understanding or better theorising about a larger collective of cases (Vaughan, 1999). Each *Community Conversation* offers a different example of this live radio format in action, which may offer more in depth or multifaceted insights than having only one case study (Smeijsters and Aasgaard, 2005). The approach allows the opportunity to apply theories, explore my research question through textual analysis and analysis of discourse features to present the ‘essence’ or ‘composite ideal’ of the topic being investigated (Deacon et al., 1997:394). As Lilie Chouliaraki (2006), argues ‘examples...stand in the tension to theory. They do not claim to articulate an eternal truth nor to have ‘universal’ applicability, but neither are they random’ (2006:10). Communications

research requires ‘a range of mental maps which can be entered at different points and navigated in a variety of ways’ (Deacon et al., 1999:2). Therefore, it is anticipated this study of these three *Community Conversations* will assist ‘mapping out’ issues linked to the broader local media terrain.

4.5.1 Approach: direct observation

Studies of media production almost inevitably rely on some form of observation of the production process which help produce a depth or fullness of texture, what anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1983) termed as ‘thick description’. Professor of Communication and Media Analysis at Loughborough University, David Deacon (2007) points out that because of the practical difficulties this entails, the literature of such studies is the smallest of any branch of media research but nonetheless, valuable.

Certainly, in researching the production of communications, there is no substitute for the rich encounters to be found in witnessing the messy business of culture manufacture. (Deacon, 2007:260)

In the pursuit of ‘rich encounters,’ Deacon notes that an advantage of observational study is how it allows a flexibility of approach which permits researchers to modify their assumptions as they go along, producing hypotheses that may be tested by complementary methods. The flexible, dialectic, or grounded character of observation means the unusual can be understood in the context of the routine and the character of this type of research allows it to make a more forceful intervention in policy debate.

Before analysing content, attention must be given to the way content is structured, the vocal manner of presentation and, sometimes, the accompanying gestural movements of the hands and face, known as paralinguistic forms of communication. Abercrombie (1968) describes these as non-linguistic elements in conversation which are culturally determined: ‘they occur alongside spoken language, interact with it and produce within it a total system of communication’ (Abercrombie, 1968:55), and eye contact is required for emotional stability and social fluency (Senju and Johnson, 2009). Public conversations can teach people how

conversation unfolds, not in proclamations or bullet points but in turn taking, negotiation and other rhythms of respect (Turkle, 2015:332). However, it is important to be clear about the possible weakness in claims to validity and representativeness that may be inherent in observational studies. While noting the advantages of plunging ‘into the life of the natives’, Malinowski (1922:21) warns observations can quickly become taken for granted by the observer and the observed. It can also be unsystematic, hence will be used sparingly to primarily to inform other research methods.

Position of this researcher

Before discussing the various research approaches, it is important to acknowledge that my analysis is both strengthened and restricted by a number of significant influences. Given the organisational context of my role as Content Manager of 936 ABC Hobart and ABC Northern Tasmania, I had direct impact on, and influence over, these forums as I had strategic oversight of their development and had authorised resourcing the programs. I was not directly engaged with topic selection; however, I did have final approval within my organisational responsibility to ensure that the proposed *Community Conversations* were in line with ABC strategic goals and would be audience-centred in approach. Critically too, I have overarching editorial and legal responsibility for the content of these forums, the behaviour of the professionals involved and was the upward point of referral for moderation of the online interaction and any audience feedback. Methods of simple observation, or being ‘a fly on the wall’ was never realistically an option for me as I have established power relationships with presenters, producers and technical operators directly involved with these forums. If there had been any problems or complaints about their conduct or programming content of *Community Conversations*, I would

have been the point of upward editorial referral as per the official ABC complaints process and this situation restricts how critical this analysis of the forums may be.

Conversely, my role as manager presented a strength for this research as it provided me with the opportunity to be involved with the series, granting me access to interview sources and content makers after the forums and the chance to observe the events and assess the impact of certain practices. This did introduce other limitations, which will be discussed later in the next section.

It is important to stress that this thesis was not done on behalf of, or at the behest of, the ABC. At the time of writing, I am still employed as the ABC Radio Hobart manager (the brand was changed to 936 ABC Hobart in January 2017). In 2012, this research project was given in-principle support from the former Director of Radio, Kate Dundas, support from current Director of Radio, Michael Mason, and has been encouraged by my line manager for most of the research period, Jeremy Millar, who shares a mutual commitment to strategically understanding more about localism and journalism. It is also appropriate to note that while this doctorate has the approval of my employer and generous co-operation of colleagues, most of the research and thesis writing has been conducted during personal time, including during extended periods of leave without pay.

4.5.1.1 Application: direct observation

The term participant observation is more properly reserved for research in which participation is necessary generating more information and data than would be possible without participation (Deacon et al., 2007). I limited my observational involvement to simply watching just one of the radio broadcasts as it was produced and aired, rather than taking an active production role in deciding topics, selecting talent or co-ordinating the production. There were two reasons for

this: such an operational approach was outside my duties as Local Content Manager and given the seniority of my position, my intervention – observer effect – would have been inappropriate, unwelcome, and would have created an ‘unnatural’ and potentially, a distracting pressure on those producing or participating in the programs. This, in turn, may have distorted the quality of data and information. Observing the immediacy of the *Community Conversation* as it went live to air was important as it allowed me to monitor the routine and patterns of the format. I was also able to observe verbal and non-verbal behaviour like body position, togetherness, interruptions, and parallel activities as they happened. Notes were not made at the time as it would have distracted the presenter and participants but were briefly recorded after the event. I was conscious of closely managing the risk of ‘going native’; having such strong familiarity with those observed that their view of the world becomes natural and taken for granted (Deacon et al., 2007:26). This was achieved by adopting a role identified as that of a passive observer (Strauss and Corbin, 1998), focused on not entering into any interaction with participants, and not influencing the flow of interaction. Despite the responsibilities of my role as manager, this allowed a flexibility of approach allowing me as a researcher to modify assumptions, particularly relevant in considering media settings and routines.

4.5.2 Approach: media texts, content and framing analysis

Research into any aspect of the media is nothing if not social, so what is needed are ways of establishing context. Textual analysis examines vocabulary, grammar cohesion, and text structure. Discourse analysis also requires the researcher to examine the strategic devices (for example irony, rhetoric and exaggeration) used by the author to reinforce an argument. Both methods present value to this inquiry.

Content analysis of media texts helps systematically identify repetitions, movements and trends in news coverage over time in more comprehensive and less subjective way than its qualitative counterparts (Hansen et al., 1998:92). A useful definition is provided by Berelson (1952:18), who describes it as: ‘A research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication’. Content analysis is an orthodox social research method used in media analysis and well regarded for providing replicability (de Vreese, 2005), by systematically identifying and counting repetitions in the text, such as words, phrases or pictures (Hayes and Krippendorff, 2007). However, this risk assuming ‘something inherent in a text that is measurable without any interpretation (Krippendorff, 2004:22). As a part of my analysis, this study includes a limited focus on individual words as sampling units to explore ‘the lexicon content and/or syntactic structures of documents’ (Beardsworth, 1980:375), in the hope of revealing distinctive patterns of co-occurrence or collocation between keywords and other words. Such findings present value, though it is limited, and they need to be complemented by more intensive and detailed qualitative textual analysis. While useful for informational and archival research, content analysis of media texts can be restricted by boundaries set by the researcher (Deacon, et al., 2007), the difficulty of ‘objectivity’ in counting (Hansen and Machin 2013 et al., 1998:95) and its inability to detect what has been omitted from the text (Krippendorff, 2004; Harcup and O’Neill 2001; Gill 2000).

Analysis of discourse features

To better understand how meaning and assumptions are embedded in texts, researchers developed new approaches to textual analysis (Gill 2000; Fairclough 1998) allowing more scrutiny of power and ideology. Analysis of discourse in terms of language and the context of its use (Deacon et al., 2007: Garrett and Bell, 1998), is more interested in social meanings, social relationships and broader contexts. The wider form of social practice analyses the

discourse by making reference to the wider context and explicit theories of hegemony and power; revealing the ideological components (explicit or implicit). The discursive politics of society can therefore be investigated in an empirical form when texts are treated like ‘forensic evidence’ (Hartley, 1992:29). Media texts have increasingly been analysed as discourse, a useful range of ways to consider meanings, contradictions, complexities and context (for discussion of various approaches see Fowler, 2013; Bell, 1998; Fairclough, 1995, 1998; Van Dijk, 1991; Bell and Garrett, 1998). This approach between social events, social practices and social structures is within a ‘critical realist’ philosophy of science (Fairclough, Jessop, and Sayer, 2002).

The usefulness of the critical discourse analysis (or CDA) as a research method was raised in the discussion about radio in Chapter Three as it helps identify relations between language, power, and ideology, and between how the world is represented in texts and how people think about the world. Drawing heavily on the work of UK linguistics scholar Norman Fairclough (2003/2000/1992), CDA emphasises the importance of ideology and the discursive strategies used by actors to shape outcomes, which is pertinent to my research on journalism-as-conversation on local radio and what role it has with facilitating public debate, diversity and rebuilding public trust. Althusser (1971) argued that, rather than being fully autonomous and self-conscious, individuals are placed (or interpellated) into certain subject positions by ideology via superstructural institutions like the education system, the media, and the family. Another aspect of identification is what people commit themselves to in what they say or write with respect to truth and with respect to obligation – matters of ‘modality’. Fairclough writes question of modality can be seen as ‘the question of what people commit themselves to when they make Statements, ask Questions, make Demands or Offers’ (2003:165). Within critical discourse analysis, this is understanding the speaker’s (or writer’s) attitude toward and/or confidence in the proposition being presented – what do speakers present in terms of truth

(epistemic modalities)? (Fowler 1985: 72). This means identifying statements in the text about 'what is' (which ideologically informed rather than objective). In terms of obligation and necessity (deontic modalities), modality is mainly implicit, but it triggers assumptions which are normative statements (Fairclough, 2003:194). This involved identifying the 'speaker's judgment that another person is obligated to perform some action' (Fowler 1985: 72). These modalities are an important part of the practices by means which people assert claims to authority or express legitimate authority. Therefore, in this inquiry into local radio, CDA provides links between a concrete social event and more abstract social practices by asking which genres, discourses, and styles are used and how they are articulated together in the text. Orders of discourse are a social structure of difference or variation and Fairclough (2013:93) writes the discourse of society is the set of these more 'local' orders of discourse and the relationship between them (e.g., the relationship of the orders of discourse between a school and home or neighbourhood). Boundaries and insulations between and within orders of discourse may be points of contest and contestation (Bernstein, 1990), open to being weakened or strengthened as part of wider social conflicts or struggles. One aspect of this ordering is dominance: some ways of making meaning are dominant or mainstream in a particular order of discourse, others are marginal, or oppositional, or 'alternative' (2003:206). The political concept of 'hegemony' can be usefully used in analysing orders of discourse (Butler et al. 2000; Fairclough 1992; Laclau and Mouffe 1985).

However, a repeated criticism of CDA is that the textual interpretations of critical linguists are politically rather than linguistically motivated, privileging individual actors and subjectivity, and understating structural factors that arise from both economic inequalities and institutional factors (Jessop, 1991; Badcock, 1996). Some argue that analysts find what they expect to find (Sharrock and Anderson, 1981), which that can be used to support a political agenda (Widdowson, 1995). A common criticism of analysis of discourse being 'unscientific' (Jacobs,

2006) is levelled at the lack of clarity in discourse analysis-based research; that is, not always being clear in setting out its methods, particularly the selection of texts.

Another approach to analysing discourse is influenced by the work of Michel Foucault (1986/1989/1977/1974/1971), who is often cited to show how discourses are used to interpret the social world (see Tonkiss, 2012; Minichiello et al., 2008). Foucault's key argument, which has had significant influence on the social sciences since the 1970s, is that discourses are contested and the researcher's key task is to identify how they exemplify conflicts over meaning that are linked to power with a rather functionalist strategy. This approach, considered to be less systematic than CDA (Hastings, 1998), focuses on power being contingent on the relationships between individuals and concentrates on the historical context in which the discourse is situated. For these reasons, it is less appropriate to the research task at hand, but is an interesting tool that may be of use when changes in discourse emerge from the outcome of power conflicts in which different groups vie to impose an agenda.

What we can learn from analysing discourse is how specific actors and contexts construct an argument, and how this argument fits into wider social practices. Such opportunities for different voices to establish common understandings make critical discourse analysis useful in assessment of how institutions 'think' (Bellier, 2005), and for research into publics (Chouliaraki, 2006).

It needs to be noted that media talk may simulate ordinary talk and uses it as a template 'the prototype of the exchange of utterances involved in talk' (Giddens, 1990:126). However, the institutional and public character of the ABC Radio analogue and digital output puts it at variance with everyday verbal exchange. Talk is always contextually defined and therefore media discussion has different discursive relations in different forms of context. For example, the radio craft skills or devices used as part of the presentation to the listening audience. They

exhibit the need to think of the spatially absent and distant listener in what Heritage (2002) calls ‘formulations’. These are techniques of summarising what an interviewee has said, stressing certain aspects of what has been said over others, exploring their implications in order to keep the audience in the picture, or declining to act as the primary recipients of interviewee response (Clayman and Heritage, 2002:120-4; Heritage, 1985). As media scholar Paddy Scannell notes:

...Broadcasting reproduces the world as ordinary but that seeming obviousness is an effect, the outcome of a multiplicity of small techniques and discursive practices that combine to produce the deeply taken-for-granted sense of familiarity with what is seen and heard. (Scannell, 1991:8)

Modes of media communication, as Scannell points out, differ from those associated with co-presence.

Framing

‘Discourse’ and ‘framing’ are difficult concepts to separate, not helped by framing being used as a term in media studies with ‘significant inconsistency’ (de Vresse, 2005:51; Fowler, 1991:43). A frame is theoretically defined as a central organising idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration (Tankard, 2001). The concept of framing is derived primarily from the work of Erving Goffman (1974). For Goffman, frames denoted ‘schemata of interpretation’ that enable individuals ‘to locate, perceive, identify, and label’ occurrences within their life space and the world at large (Goffman, 1974:21). This refers to the idea that prior knowledge, perspectives, and assumptions inform how new information is understood and is a useful tool

to identify the sense-making applied in news making (Iyengar, 1994; McCombs et al., 1997). Frames are manifest in the ways that people choose to argue for their positions. As Entman (1993) observed, frames can also be detected by probing for the presence or absences of certain key words; ‘framing essentially involves selection and salience’ (1993:53), and they have several locations, including the communicator, the text, the receiver, and the culture. These components are integral to a process of framing that consists of three stages: frame-building, frame-setting and individual and societal level consequences of framing (d’Angelo 2002; de Vreese 2002; Scheufele 2000).

Framing also describes the internal frameworks of knowledge through which individuals correlate new knowledge and concepts with their own experiences and ideology (Entman, 1993). The success of frames requires journalists to find sources who will ‘sponsor’ the frame by commenting (Gamson, 1992:26), and these frames need to be consistent and credible for the frame to endure (Benford and Snow, 2000:619). The success of any particular frame depends upon collaboration between journalists and their sources that results in a story being framed in a way that makes sense to audiences (de Vreese, 2005; Gans, 1980; Tuchman, 1978). Journalists cannot avoid framing because the process begins the moment journalists start to make sense of an event (Gitlin, 1980; Cappella and Jamieson, 1997). Therefore, media frames provide a key analytical site, as Todd Gitlin (1980) writes:

Media frames, largely unspoken and unacknowledged, organize the world, both for journalists who report it and in some degree for us, who rely on their reports. Media frames are persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual. Frames enable journalists to process large amounts of information quickly and routinely: to recognize it as information, to assign it to cognitive categories, and to package it for efficient relay to their audiences. Thus, for organizational reasons alone, frames are unavoidable, and journalism is organized to regulate their production. Any analytic approach to

journalism – indeed, to the production of any mass-mediated content – must ask: what is the frame here? (Gitlin, 1980:7)

As Gitlin, and Hall (1982) highlight, frames are an important way for journalists recognise information and relay it. While media texts have many possible meanings, Hall said they tend to be: ‘structured in dominance, hierarchically organised into dominant or preferred meanings’ and it is at precisely these points that hegemony operates (Hall, 1982a:169). Dominant frames reflect and support the major institutions of society and are widely shared among individual members of society (Hertog and McLeod, 2003). Decades of media scholarship have shown that public opinion can be significantly influenced by news framing (Chong and Druckman, 2007; Gilovich, 1981; Macrae et al., 1994). According to David Altheide, news coverage frequently applies problem frames to an issue or event beginning with a ‘general conclusion something is wrong ‘which is blamed on a ‘familiar and uncontested’ list of suspects, before finally prescribing a ‘correction or ‘repair agent (1997:655). James Hertog and Douglas McLeod (2003) claim the role of social institutions, including the media in the development and maintenance of, or challenge to, frames has not been adequately studied. They suggest study of the sociology of media organisations, similar to the work of Tuchman (1978), Gans (1980), or Hesse et al. (2011), needs to be undertaken but with an eye toward determining how media organisations frame topics. Journalists’ framing of an issue and selection of sources may be influenced by professional routines, organisational pressures and constraints, external pressures from interest groups and other policy makers, larger societal norms and values, as well as their own ideological or political orientation. Relational practices are a key way of assessing media impact (Simons et al., 2016). Previous research has included ethnographic and participant observation studies of news rooms and/or interviews of editorial staff (see, for example, Tuchman 1978; Gans, 1979). However, previous studies of newsrooms as the primary site of negotiation have excluded focus on the settings of other negotiations between

with various sources and the sources themselves, like personal connections (Zelizer, 2004; Hansen et al., 1994). Research on the emotional effects of news framing shows message-relevant emotions have specific consequence for information processing and opinion formation (Kuhne and Schemer, 2015, Nabi, 2007). While no comprehensive framework explains how and under what conditions message-relevant discrete emotions affect judgement formation, it raises questions about the impact of moderators that may enhance or suppress such effects (Kuhne and Schemer, 2015:404).

Quantitative analysis applied to framing research is usually a means to identifying language use in texts. Counting number of times certain categories or words are use can be helpful in ascertaining the frames employed and the rhetoric used. However, one shortcoming of quantitative text analysis methods is that many powerful concepts or central frames need not be repeated often to have a great impact (Hertog and McLeod, 2003). The study of framing means cultural expertise needs to be applied to induce the meaning of texts. Human judgement is necessary to approach the essential question about what could have been in the content, but is not (Hertog and McLeod, 2003).

4.5.2.1 Application: media texts, content and framing analysis

A variety of media texts and documents were used for content and framing analysis. These include transcripts of *Community Conversation* broadcast events, relevant news stories, and documents which helped establish the context of issues and opportunities for content analysis. Transcripts from each of the *Community Conversations* were generated for analysis, as repetition – the pile-up of material under one of the categories – is considered to be a useful indicator of significance. A mapping method, which involved counting the frequency of words and phrases, was used to search for patterns of repetition or consistent themes in each of the

Community Conversations event transcripts to identify central concepts that made up a variety of frames. Each step was undertaken with the intention of minimising the subjectivity that can creep into assumptions about dominant frames (see Entman, 1993). The content analysis method used to thematically organise the transcripts of interviews is a hybrid of deductive and inductive positioning. Broadly speaking, a deductive position is usually centred on the use of existing theory and framing schema to analyse and search for meaning in the data. In contrast, an inductive position focuses on identifying themes and patterns grounded in the data. In other words, findings are data driven in that they have had no pre-existing conditions or categorising schemes applied to them. The data has been allowed to speak in its own right, as the researcher searches for patterns, and ultimately meaning, that evolve directly from the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Patton, 2002; Saunders et al., 2000; Boyatzis, 1998). As Michael Patton writes:

The challenge of qualitative analysis is making sense of massive amounts of data. This involves reduction raw information, sifting trivia from significance, identifying significant patterns and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveals. (2002:492)

In this observation, Patton refers to the challenge of breaking down the data in a bid to make sense of it. The method of framing analysis helps guide the construction of such a ‘framework’ and identify useful patterns in the data.

As discussed in the previous section, a common feature at the core of most media framing is basic conflict, often reflexively chosen by a journalist (Smith, 1997). In my personal experience, this is often identified by defensiveness, denial, hostility, and fearfulness when identities or the subject are being challenged, so I looked for signs of that in the discourse. Other framing types that emerged included conflict management, solutions-orientated and civic framing; which deals with public life and focuses on process (Tankard et al., 2001; Smith,

1997). Another source of framing is the deliberate attempt of individuals or groups to structure public discourse in a way that privileges their goals and means of attaining them. This ‘advocacy’ framing was clearly evident in each of the texts. While I was unable to reduce my frame analysis to single word counting useful at the more quantitative end of the content analysis spectrum, I found that counting occurrences, without seeking to quantify or qualify the dominant frames, directed me to usages that required further investigation. I relied examining strategic devices used to reinforce arguments and noting the explicit or implicit ideological components in texts that make reference to the wider contest and explicit theories of hegemony and power. Efforts were made to contextualise individual agency making clear the wider and social political milieu. This was to overcome common criticism that discourse analysis privileges individual actors and subjectivity, understating structural factors that arise from both institutional practices and economic inequalities (Jessop, 1991; Badcock, 1996). I also employed similar methods to analyse contemporary news texts on the issue being discussed to establish what the dominant frames were and whether any difference in how the local issues were being framed by the media and selected sources could be ascertained following the *Community Conversation*. Consistently, research has shown that mainstream news is dominated by elite sources – predominantly politicians and their spokespersons – which has not changed; despite technologies like social media that facilitate and broaden participation (Whal-Jorgensen et.al, 2016).

While the concept of media framing is familiar to me as a journalist and editorial leader of more than three decades’ experience, my theoretical understanding of this concept and associated issues was expanded and challenged while I reviewed contemporary literature and research in Chapters Two and Three. This process follows an approach adopted by Hansen and Machin (2013), who note that anchoring content analysis in relation to the review of relevant literature ensures the researcher can build from comparison with other research. A limitation

of content analysis in terms of investigating my research questions is that it does not offer much opportunity to explore texts in order to develop more complex ideas or insights, nor establish them in social and ideological contexts. Hence, interviewing the actors involved in these broadcast events also had to take central focus in my mixed methods approach.

4.5.3 Approach: interviewing the participants

The long interview is one of the most powerful methods in qualitative research. For certain descriptive and analytic purposes, no instrument of inquiry is more revealing (McCracken, 1988). As a research method, interviewing has contributed to significant findings in the professional communication strategies of those engaged in social change campaigns, environmental protest and other mediated conflict (Lester, 2007; Atton and Wickenden, 2005; Gamson and Wolfsfeld, 1993; van Zoonen, 1992; Gitlin, 1980). While the interview process can be criticised for being a record of an individual's subjective response to questions, framed by the subjectivity of the researcher (Flick et al., 2004), this should not stop a researcher putting questions to individuals that cannot be gleaned from other sources (Lindlof and Taylor, 2011). Instead of being undertaken in the naïve belief that there is a singular truth that need only be revealed through careful questioning, interviews can be guided by the principle that social knowledge is constructed through many encounters with people, rather than any singular interaction (Deacon et al., 2018/2007; Richards, 2011). In the estimation of Beatrice Webb: 'The first condition of the successful use of the interview as an instrument of research is preparedness of the mind of the operator' (Webb, 1975:136). As Deacon et al. (2007) note, this is not the same as the injunction to be 'neutral' or 'disengaged' in the interests of the collection of 'objective' data; rather, it is more recognition of the practical difficulties and tensions involved in qualitative interviewing, which always require the establishment of trust, mutual respect and interactive rapport if to be successful (Deacon et al., 2007:294).

There are different interviewing techniques that can be used in empirical research. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:3) divide the research interview process into three phases: 'finding out how these people view the situations they face, how they regard one another and also how they see themselves'. Kvale (1996:4) describes the interviewer as either a 'miner' or a 'traveller'; the former seeking what is buried, digging beneath conscious experiences to unearth truths and

unknown nuggets of fact, and the latter as someone who is conversationally wandering with the interviewee to understand the perspectives of the other's worldview. More specifically, interviews can be open, such as a conversation, or structured, such as a set of specific questions asked in the same context in each of the interviews. The hybrid of these is the semi-structured or in-depth interview, which combines pre-determined questions to enable a degree of structure, but also allows the interviewee to be more relaxed in how they answer the questions and allows for unexpected knowledge and perspectives to be voiced (Hansen and Machin, 2013; Klocke and McDevitt, 2013). In a naturalistic way, this allows guidance of informants to ensure the interview generates content suitable to the research agenda (Lindlof, 1995). While long semi-structured interviews can suffer from a lack of control on the part of the interviewer and results in large amounts of irrelevant information (McCracken, 1988:40), there are important reasons for this approach. It achieves crucial qualitative objectives within a manageable methodological context (McCracken, 1988). This approach is designed to encourage interviewees to share spontaneous discussion of all aspects of the subject which may concern or interest them: 'generate their own questions, frames and concepts and pursue their own priorities on their own terms, in their own vocabulary' (Kitzinger and Barbour, 1999:4). This relative 'open-endedness' allows greater opportunities for clarification, expansion, comparison, and sociological exploration.

As discussed in the earlier section, understanding the professional assumptions, logics and practices of the people and institutions that influence news content is an important part of understanding the role of news in civil society (Philo, 2007; Schlesinger, 1978). Therefore, a key way to learn about these processes is to interview the people involved (Davis, 2006).

4.5.3.1 Application: interviewing the participants

The intention is that this conversational approach ‘takes on the form and feel of talk between peers: loose, informal, coequal, interactive, committed, open ended and empathic’ (Lindlof, 1995:164). To facilitate this organic and responsive approach, interviewees were interviewed face-to-face in their own environments and so minimise the ‘artificiality’ of the research process and generate some insights into beliefs and perceptions. While naturalistic interviews ape everyday conversation, they will simultaneously guide informants towards certain topics, encourage them to express their attitudes, beliefs, and feelings, and discourage them from wandering too far from the chosen research track (Deacon et al., 2007:292). My experience as a journalist equips me to allow the questions and answers to flow, to develop a movement and momentum that emulates the to-and-fro pattern of everyday talk. Webb believes ‘the less formal the conditions of the interview the better’ (Webb and Webb, 1975:139). However, the interviews needed to be semi-structured to ensuring certain matters relevant to my research questions were covered and pursue or investigate some interesting responses in more detail (Gray, 2013; Saunders et al., 2000). Semi-structured interviews allow for more flexibility than structured interviews, which keep to a rigorous script. This enables me to compare different participants' responses to similar questions and see how themes emerge. Interviewees were selected on the basis of either being directly involved in *Community Conversations* during 2013 or their influence on a specific aspect on the issues or programs, such as behind-the-scenes media staff like content directors, the marketing manager and the then-Managing Director of the ABC, Mark Scott. I approached a total of twenty-two people via email and telephone. Twenty-one were available to be interviewed. Face-to-face interviews took place with during a period of three months in the latter part of 2013 and early 2014 at a variety of locations around Tasmania. Mark Scott was interviewed during a visit to Hobart. Informed consent was sought and obtained under the University of Tasmania’s ethics guidelines. Questions were designed

to establish each participant's connection to the forums and their perceptions of the *Community Conversation* event and experience, as well as wider reflections on the standard of social and political discourse. As discussed earlier, there are significant benefits of the in-depth, one-on-one interview method in this thesis, including the background of the researcher. As an experienced journalist, I was comfortable in the interview setting and was familiar with the artificial arrangement of being the one to ask the questions, which always prevents an interview from being a conversation (Malcolm, 1990). Generally, the asking of direct closed questions was avoided, with my role of the researcher essentially passive with no pre-conceptions imposed on the scope or direction of the interview. I did however follow a partial plan of consistent open-ended exploratory questions underpinning the pattern and rhythm of each of the interviews. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the selection of sources and the professional routines of the media practitioners are focal points of interest of this inquiry so interviews were approached in ways to produce useful insights into the choice and motivation of participants presenting information, ideas, and positions within texts. The face-to-face interviewees comprised thirteen *Community Conversation* participants and eight ABC staff involved in the journalism-as-conversation events. *Community conversation* participants included: Briony Kidd, Paul Johnston, Dianne Snowden, Adrian Kelly, Aaron Everett, Sallyann McShane, Kristen Desmond, Chris Rayner, Lynne James, Terry Polglase, Jo Archer, John Ali, Natalie DeVito. The pattern and rhythm of interviewing participants opened with how they became involved with the event, what their expectations were at the outset, what they thought of the experience, setting and conduct of the content makers and other participants, how participation in the *Community Conversation* differed to other media engagement they may have experienced and what feedback they had received about their participation. They were also asked to reflect upon what impact, if any had emerged as a result of their participation and their

thoughts on how the medium is different to others, like social media and TV in terms of connection.

My professionally-developed skill of probing was sometimes used to encourage the interviewee to elicit a response, and following up a response by seeking clarification or amplification of what has been said. This approach is cognate with the emphasis on ‘sharing’ experience, which some feminist researchers have preferred to the ‘masculine’ emphasis on disengagement and control over exchange; in their view, this approach is artificial, undesirable, and not conducive to the establishment of a necessary rapport within the exchange (see Oakley, 1981; Finch, 1993). ABC content makers and managers interviewed were: Louise Saunders, Sarah Gillman, Carol Raabus, Kathy Gates Lou Garnier, Michael Merrington, Chris Ball and ABC managing director, Mark Scott. Most of the content makers were asked to specifically to describe their role in the *Community Conversations*, their perceptions of the format in terms of how journalism serves the community, what worked or didn’t with each event, questions about source selection, technical and digital activity. They were also asked to share any feedback they received from listeners or digital followers on social media or station website, and what their views were about what impact, if any, the events had created in terms of political or social change. Questions were also asked in relation to how this activity aligned, or not, to the strategic intent and values of the ABC. Merrington, Gates and Ball were all made redundant from the ABC during organisational restructuring in 2014 and 2015. Ball continues to work in radio, as a volunteer at Launceston’s City Park radio. Merrington and Gates are pursuing other professional opportunities. As mentioned in Chapter Three, Scott finished his leadership of the ABC in 2016 and was replaced by the current Managing Director, Michelle Guthrie. The same year, I attempted to contact with the group of international students who had been inducted into Launceston Rotary in 2013. This was done through social media networks (Facebook, LinkedIn) and the University of Tasmania online database. One former student, Agatha

Aasiimwe, replied and an interview was conducted via email, as she is now based in the United States.

Interviewees were mostly interested and keen to be involved in this research, although there was slight apprehension from some ABC staff about being interviewed about their media processes and relational practices by their manager. This was overcome by explaining the clear purpose of these interviews. I made it clear they were not focused on performance but rather to gain their views on the context, conduct and perceptions of what impact may have emerged from the *Community Conversations*. Nevertheless, this reticence and potential impact on the interview data is taken into account in my analysis.

All interviews were all recorded by using a recording app called IsaidWhat? on my smartphone and tablet. This was clearly explained to the interviewees and reassurances given that the content will only be used for research for this thesis. The choice of these everyday devices for the recording helped the informality of meetings and discussions. Some non-ABC participants had to be reassured it was not for broadcast. Mechanical recordings were chosen as they would be much more accurate than any notes I would make during or after the interview. The form of qualitative interviewing acquires a 'different epistemological status' when it is not recorded: it becomes 'hearsay evidence' (Lummis, 1987:24). Interviews were fully transcribed for analysis. Each participant was provided with an information sheet about my research and this helped provide greater understanding in the project. Each participant received an emailed copy of the transcript of their interview with me and were invited to make any changes or clarification. The opportunity to redact is a recognised method in interviews that can reassure both interviewees and interviewers (Richards, 2011). Only one participant, Briony Kidd sought changes – due to background noise in the recording, the transcript record of our conversation required partial clarification.

The mixed methods approach to the research aim and questions was applied in the following order: observation study of one *Community Conversation* was completed and summarised post event; media texts, including press articles, reports and department documents were selected and sourced for analysis; interviewees were selected; ethics approval was sought from the University of Tasmania and granted; interviewees were invited to participate in interviews and provided with information sheets; interviews were conducted; interview data and program transcripts were generated; textual analysis was conducted and then information was cross-checked with the interviewee participants and other texts.

Before moving onto to an examination of case studies, context, data and reflections in the next three chapters, it must be mentioned that this research began with what Hall (1975:15) describes as ‘a long preliminary soak’ in all materials – the media texts, interview transcripts and observation notes. In turn, this informed my choice of the particular methods detailed in this chapter and helped design the structure of the next three chapters. Each case study starts with an introduction to the tensions and context of the issue at the heart of each *Community Conversation*, before shifting focus to the broadcast event itself. Analysis of discourse features of the events, reflections of participants and an examination of impacts assist with generating data for analysis. Now equipped with four research questions and methods to guide this inquiry, this thesis is ready to move onto Part Two and the first radio forum event under investigation.

PART 2

The Conversations

CHAPTER FIVE

Community Conversation: Whose heritage is worth saving?

5.1 The issue

As discussed in Chapter One, Tasmania faces significant social and economic challenges, burdened with high unemployment, an ageing population and poor health outcomes. Contributing to the troubled fiscal outlook is an ugly track record of frustrated development and contested land use, marked by conflict and destruction. Natural resources have been its economic foundation, with mining, agriculture, forestry and tourism among main industries. Throughout the 1990s, a vicious circle developed after the recession through declining employment, income, consumption, investment and business activity (Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics, 2008).

While the Tasmanian Government brightly forecasts a positive economic outlook with strong household consumption and a buoyant tourism industry (Tasmanian Dept. Treasury, 2016), anxiety prevails about low levels of employment and the broader economic outlook. There is a long track record of large-scale projects in Tasmania being subjected to, and sometimes derailed by, extended public arguments about the impact of development on the state's environmental, cultural and heritage values. This chapter will focus on community tensions in Tasmania's capital city, Hobart, about built, environmental and cultural heritage matters in the *Community Conversation: Whose heritage is worth saving?* The next two chapters will discuss and analyse two other *Community Conversations*, one focused on disability in education and the other on international students. Each of these chapters will produce data for analysis in response to identified research questions and themes of this thesis about local media, citizen engagement, diversity, media practices and public broadcasting.

According to economist Jonathan West, former director of the University of Tasmania's Australian Innovation Research Centre (AIRC), Tasmania has bred a dominant social coalition that blocks most proposals to improve its economic outlook.

Problems and challenges are debated endlessly, with no resolution. Most discussion avoids mention of the uncomfortable truths at the source of underperformance. The underlying problem is simple but intractable: Tasmania has developed a way of life, a mode of doing things, a demographic, a culture and associated economy, that reproduces underachievement generation after generation. (West, 2013)

West's argument about Tasmania having an underachieving culture with a record of underperformance was presented in an essay titled 'Obstacles to progress' in a Tasmanian-themed collection in the literary magazine, *Griffith Review* and republished on the *Crikey* website with the headline 'What's wrong with Tasmania, Australia's freeloading state?'. West cites a lack of political leadership in Tasmania and a poor standard of public debate as two major hurdles to progress: 'Problems and challenges are debated endlessly, with no resolution. Most discussion avoids mention of the uncomfortable truths at the source of underperformance' (West, 2013).

This perspective is supported by more than seven online comments on the independent *Crikey* website. One of the comments claims public debate in Tasmania is stifled at the local level by the relatively small community network: 'When any citizen can ring/email a local alderman or minister and get on their back, and these politicians are too concerned with dealing with petty issues rather than perhaps telling the individual their personal issues come second to the greater good of society' (Hill, 2013) and when 'There is a lack of trust founded on a lack of openness, and then truly listening. With a small population, the fear of opening up and saying something which may lead to longer term isolation is real in Tasmania (Fon, 2013). These postings suggest restricted and closed discussions about matters of public interest, posing key questions about

what topics are being discussed in local media, how they are being conducted, and also, of central concern to this thesis, whose voices are being heard and why. It prompts important questions about why it should matter for the community to be more widely to be engaged in debate about issues affecting its social and economic future and what role media has in rebuilding public trust.

Land use conflict

In the quest for answers, it is necessary to reflect on the past. The very founding of Tasmania's capital, Hobart, in 1804 by Lt-Governor Collins was marked by conflict and bloodshed. Forty-nine settlers, made up of NSW Corp personnel, administration, free settlers and convicts under leadership of Lt John Bowen had arrived in Van Diemen's Land, now Tasmania, at Risdon Cove, about seven kilometres north of what became Hobart. While details are contested, historical records show that in September 1804 a local group of Aborigines, probably the Leenowewenne and the Pangerninghe clans, blundered in to the settlement on their autumn migration towards the East Coast. Soldiers, who thought they were under attack, killed an uncorroborated number of the Indigenous people. Physical clashes continued around the state until the last of the original inhabitants were moved first to Flinders island in 1833, and then finally to Oyster Bay in the state's south in 1847. Details of what became known as the Black War are much contested amongst historians and even sectors of the Indigenous community (Refshauge, 2007; Reynolds, 2006/1996; Windshuttle, 2003; Ryan, 1996). Historian Lyndall Ryan names Tasmania as the cradle of race relations in the nineteenth century and that continues today in the Aboriginal quest for land right and social justice (Ryan, 1996). Sectors of the Tasmanian Aboriginal community are still fighting for recognition: politically, in Australia's Constitution and symbolically, at a local level, with campaigns for dual naming of key locations in the state (TAC, 2015).

It is a continuing battle in the state, amongst Indigenous groups themselves as well as with the State Government. Cultural heritage is defined to be ‘in relation to a place, means significance to any group or community in relation to the archaeological, architectural, cultural, historical, scientific, social, or technical value of the place’ (Historic Cultural Heritage Act 1995). Advocacy on cultural heritage is shared between the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre (TAC) and the Tasmanian Regional Aboriginal Communities Alliance (TRACA). The latter lobby group, formed in 2015, supports assessment by Tasmanian Government’s Aboriginal Heritage Council while the TAC wants its own nominees to carry out survey work.

The latest area of contest is the Arthur-Pieman Conservation Area on the northern West Coast, known as the Tarkine since 1991. The name Tarkine was coined by the conservation movement (McGaurr et al., 2014), diminutive of the name ‘Tarkiner’, the anglicised pronunciation of one of the Aboriginal tribes who inhabited the western Tasmanian coastline before European colonisation. It is described as containing the richest Aboriginal historical record of any coastal area in Australia (Jones, 1965). To prevent four-wheel drive vehicles (4WDs) from churning over middens, hut depressions and rock engravings in the Takayna region, the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre (TAC) sought an emergency injunction in 2015 from the Federal Court blocking the Tasmanian Government from opening up tracks in the region. In May 2016, the court agreed with the TAC that development of the tracks would have a ‘significant impact’ and cause ‘damage and harm’ on the ‘fragile landscape (Carlyon, 2016). Yet the court ruling angered the local Circular Head Aboriginal Corporation, which supports limited track access to the area, claiming there are no direct ancestral ties to the area. What frustrated TRACA is that the TAC prevented those Indigenous voices from being heard on the issue (Cameron and Dillon, 2016). Many of the off-road enthusiasts, who have had holiday ‘shacks’ in the region for several generations,

argue that access through the off-road tracks constitutes *their* cultural rights. One Tasmanian shack community, Lettes Bay on the West Coast, was listed on the Heritage Registrar because it demonstrates a particular aspect of Tasmania's social and recreational history and meets several of the criteria specified in the state's Historic Cultural Heritage Act. On 16 September 2016, the Full Federal Court handed down a unanimous decision in the Tasmanian Government's appeal against the earlier judgement that the proposed re-opening of 4WD tracks was likely to have a significant impact on Indigenous heritage values. The TAC continues to campaign to be the legal land manager of the area, against the wishes of the TRACA, representative of the local Aboriginal community.

Media coverage of the Tarkine track debate has been mostly framed in the media as Indigenous cultural rights versus those of recreational users, as captured in these headlines: 'Rogue 4WD users tearing up Tarkine' (Lohberger, 2015), 'Tarkine 4WD tracks reopen like an old wound' (Denholm, 2014), 'Off-road motorists' continued use of Tarkine tracks makes farce of ban' (Atkin and Salmon, 2015), and 'Off road enthusiasts reignited fight over tracks on Tasmania's west coast' (Shannon, 2016).

Environmental conflict

For the past five decades, bitter dispute has also reigned in Tasmania over development and the environment, typically framed in the media as a contest over economic survival, in terms of a clash of pro- and anti-development forces as the State Government craves investment in industry to stimulate its economy and provide desperately needed jobs. For a century, the Hydro Electric Commission shaped Tasmania's industries, economy, landscape and community. The Hydro's legacy is not only its engineering and construction feats, but also its lasting impact on the State's population, politics and culture as many of the workers came from

overseas. Industries boomed with cheap electricity from massive integrated hydro-electric power until severe drought in the late 1950s prompted power restrictions, ushering in proposals for several major new developments including flooding Lake Pedder and the proposal to dam Gordon below Franklin River on the west coast, which would spark Tasmania's greatest environmental conflict.

The campaign to save Lake Pedder in the mid-1960s is regarded a key moment in the birth of the Australian environment movement which was followed less than a decade later by the campaign to save the Franklin River in 1982 which this triggered 1217 arrests and thrust Tasmania's wilderness protest into the global media. Since then, there have been major protest campaigns against certain logging practices and plans for pulp mills at Wesley Vale (1989) and more recently, another for the Tamar Valley near the regional city of Launceston. The \$1.7 billion pulp mill proposal by Gunns Limited deeply divided public opinion. With his supporters in state and federal politics, the company's CEO, John Gay, was audacious with his bold plan for further industrialise the state's forests. Public hearings into the project were abandoned in 2007 when Gunns walked away from independent planning process, saying it was taking too long to reach a verdict. Immediately, the Labor government responded a highly controversial, custom-built fast track approvals process. In response, an unprecedented show of environmental activism involving corporate campaigns and mass public rallies emerged. With such large numbers of Tasmanians, and institutional investors, opposed to the pulp mill, Gunns went bankrupt.

News media has played a central role in these political, environment and economic conflicts, both as umpire and player (Lester, 2005:224). Media scholar Libby Lester's study of Tasmanian wilderness conflict, as it developed through the media, revealed journalists working through Gitlin's 'selections and omissions, through emphases and tones, through all their forms of treatments' (1980:9) to retain power in the relationship with environmental protesters. They

granted or denied access, framed or reframed (Lester, 2005). In 2006, the Launceston-based *The Examiner* newspaper, writes scholar and journalist Quentin Beresford, was a clear champion of the Gunns pulp mill project, promoting it as an economic saviour for the region:

Not only did the paper's support for the mill never waver, it was seen as having been in 'lock step' with Gunns for years. Critics repeatedly claimed that its coverage was biased, including claims it regularly refused to publish letters to the editor critical of the project and of Gunns. (Beresford, 2015:162)

Beresford argues that *The Examiner* was embedded in an anti-democratic system of power supported by both major political parties, business, and unions. Cultural factors, linked to Tasmania's small size, are seen by Hay (1977:12) as part of a series of corruption scandals going back to the 1940s, as the state lacked the capacity to ensure proper rules were followed when bureaucrats and ministers mixed closely with the same small handful of business interests (see also Boyce, 2017). A sensational bribery attempt in 1989 was made by a prominent businessman Edmund Rouse to stop the Greens forming political alliance with the Labor party. A royal commission later heard that Rouse thought Gunns stood to lose between \$10 million and \$15 million as a result of the Labor-Green accord (Darby, 2002). Gunns arose out of, and grafted itself onto, Tasmania's distinct political culture and the effect of this culture was 'to produce an undercurrent of fear of speaking out, a reluctance to challenge the status quo' (Beresford 2015:235).

Built heritage conflict

Tasmania's capital city, Hobart, has some of the finest sandstone buildings remaining in Australia, including the stately Town Hall on Macquarie Street and historic warehouses that line Salamanca Place near the city's harbour. Most are on the Tasmanian Heritage Register,

managed by the Tasmanian Heritage Council, a statutory body separate to government which also has responsibility for administration of the Historic Cultural Heritage Act 1995. Any development on heritage-listed places requires the approval of the Council before works can commence. The combination of Tasmania's colonial history, the vast tracts of wilderness and the state's geographic isolation led to the emergence of tourism as a key industry and economic stimulant in the 1960s. Tasmania's natural assets, and the internationally renowned, privately owned MONA art museum, are pivotal to the brand of the state's current burgeoning tourism industry which provides approximately 40,000 jobs, or about seventeen-point-four percent of total Tasmanian employment, the highest proportion in the country (Department of State Growth, 2014).

However, the built and environmental environments, identified in the very same Tasmanian Government report as being critical to tourism brand, are constantly framed in the media as contested territory. Disunity over developments for the capital city of Hobart, for example, are frequently framed in the media in conflict terms; antagonists or opposing forces against proposals from politically or economically powerful forces. For more than one hundred years, debate has raged over proposals for a cable car on picturesque Mount Wellington, which rises thirteen hundred metres over the city (O'Connor, 2017), with even a coffee shop to cater for visitors to the mountain facing protest (Whitson, 2017). In 2015, ten residents in well-heeled historic Battery Point fought and won a court action against Hobart City Council's plans for a public cycleway and walkway in front of their waterfront homes. Yet the fight is far from over as the council is ploughing on with its plans to gain foreshore (Gardner, 2017). Strong, often poisonous, polarities dominate local media discourse. According to a director of a local architectural firm, Damian Rogers, the state is 'unable to discriminate between high value areas and progress, as opposed to saving everything in trying to balance its built heritage and natural environment' (Howard, 2015). Former Hobart Lord Mayor Damon Thomas says the

community appears opposed to change: ‘When a new idea is put up in Hobart, the “naysayers” pull it down: call it a Tasmanian syndrome or psychosis or something else. It seems to be the way we approach new and old ideas – with a rather unhealthy tone of cynicism, sometimes before idea has even fully emerged’ (Howard, 2015).

This is well illustrated by what became known as the ‘red awnings debate’ of 2011, which inspired a series of works by local cartoonist Jon Kudelka. The Heritage Council ruled against the red ornamental window awnings on an old sandstone bank in the CBD as they were deemed incompatible with the building’s heritage values. It prompted 50 people to rally outside Parliament House in June 2011 in support of the awnings and the ban was overturned by the Hobart City Council. Dissenting councillor, Darlene Haigh, described the decision as ‘reprehensible’, based on a media campaign (*ABC*, 2011) and Tasmanian cartoonist Jon Kudelka dubbed it ‘The Awning Apocalypse’.

This cartoon has been removed for copyright or proprietary reasons.

Figure 1. (Kudelka, 2012a)

Two major development controversies dominated media coverage and political debate in Hobart in the period before ABC's *Community Conversation* on heritage in 2013. They relate to the demolition of a CBD office block and the construction of a key arterial road into the city.

Save 10 Murray

The first controversy was the protest against the proposed demolition of a 1969 State Government office tower at 10 Murray Street to make way for a \$100 million 'Parliament Square' redevelopment with offices and large public square similar to Melbourne's vibrant Federation Square, with cafes, shops and an amphitheatre. This debate was largely framed in the local media as being about civic progress and development, as indicated in this Editorial in *The Mercury*: 'The loss of 10 Murray St is the price we pay for opening up most of the block, providing public access and saving other buildings in the process, at little expense to taxpayers' (*The Mercury*, 2009).

While it is argued that the post-war office tower of 10 Murray Street is ugly, or inappropriately situated (Harkins, 2012), others see it as a significant example of 1960s architecture associated with functionalism and abstract art (Johnston, 2009). These qualities had inspired the Australian Institute of Architects to recommend 10 Murray Street for inclusion in the National Estate Register in 1997 but it was never formalised. Former Heritage Council chairman Michael Lynch said the proposed destruction of 10 Murray St shows up Tasmania's 'obsession with sandstone' and the failure to do enough to protect good examples of 20th-century buildings (*The Mercury*, 2009). When it became known the property was targeted for demolition, a protest group called 'Save 10 Murray' emerged, consisting of 'people of diverse backgrounds who share a common appreciation of cultural heritage and the building known as 10 Murray Street' (*Save 10 Murray*, 2011). It campaigned for a compromised redevelopment plan: 'New twist for old block' (Mather, 2011). Subsequent legal action by the group, including

an appeal to the Supreme Court, failed. The Labor government fast tracked specific legislation to prevent any further planning appeals. The Government's approach was challenged by more than twenty-five letters to the Editor to *The Mercury* over a three-year period, some alleging special deals: 'I wonder why have planning rules and regulations at all when they provide a challenge to developers that special legislative provisions are enacted to exempt them?' (*The Mercury*, 2012a).

Twelve contributors to *The Mercury's* Letters to the Editor during that month likened the handling of Parliament Square to the Government's fast-tracking of legislation for the Gunns Tamar Valley pulp mill, with the sentiment expressed in a Kudelka cartoon titled 'Pulp the act.'

This cartoon has been removed for copyright or proprietary reasons.

Figure 2. (Kudelka, 2012b)

When construction work on the site started, *The Mercury* was triumphant with its headline: 'Square gets start at last. Hundreds of jobs in major project' (Richards, 2012b). At the time of writing, the bulldozers and wrecking ball excavators are at still at work in the precinct.

The Brighton Bypass

A second major local controversy emerged in 2011 during the construction of the Brighton Bypass. It is a \$176 million north/south bypass of the state's major arterial route, the Midland Highway, diverting traffic away from northern Hobart satellite suburbs of Pontville and Brighton. The Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre (TAC) claimed construction of the bridge over the Jordan River Levee or Kutalayna would disturb Indigenous artefacts dating back 42,000 years and established a protest camp on site. The State Heritage Minister Brian Wightman claimed a bridge over the Levee would actually protect artefacts (Neales, 2011). It was salt on centuries' old social wounds in this island state. Faced with the prospect of highway bitumen being poured over what was believed to be an ancient site of their ancestors, the community erupted in anger with more than 40 Indigenous protesters storming a barricade around the site. Twenty-one demonstrators, including Aboriginal heritage officer Aaron Everett, were arrested in their bid to protect what they claimed was an Aboriginal site of world significance (Raabus, 2011). This issue was mainly framed in conflict terms by the local media with headlines like 'It's War' (*The Mercury*, 2011), 'Activists dig in their heels over Brighton Bypass' (*ABC*, 2011b), 'Black clash bypassed Brighton heritage protest digs in' (Neales, 2011), and 'Brighton bypass protest ramps up' (Johnson, 2011). In one TV current affairs story, the reporter voice-over featured the following words and phrases: 'battleground', 'battle scarred warrior' with 'Aborigines vowing to stop at nothing' and 'fighting for control' (*Stateline*, 2009). TV images and press photographs show protesters shouting behind fences, then being dragged by police through the mud towards paddy wagons. In the public comments section on the independent online *Tasmanian Times* in December 2010, the mixed reaction in the comments section of the independent online website to the Brighton protest was suggestive of the polarity in the community: 'It's a rubbish dump. A very old rubbish dump, but still just a rubbish dump' and

‘Lands riven with artefacts have the means of dealing with these problems. Are we too uncivil to adopt such measures or just racist enough to believe one heritage is better than another?’ Others accused the Government of bypassing community approval: ‘Government should be brought to account for how much these shortcuts are costing the state, not just in money but in disaffected people.’ The intensity of the Brighton dispute shocked journalist Sue Neales who wrote in *The Mercury*:

One would expect amazement, awe and pride to be overwhelming sentiment and feeling of all Tasmanians at the discovery of such ancient evidence of early man existing on Hobart’s rural doorstep. Instead the reaction has largely been antagonistic and abhorrently racist. (Neales, 2010)

In her online commentary, Neales notes low levels of public awareness and knowledge about cultural heritage. When the ceremonial ribbon was cut at the Brighton bypass opening on 13th November 2012, about 30 Aboriginal demonstrators continued the protest in front of waiting media. The government said it hoped to work with Aboriginal community leaders in setting up an interpretative centre at the site.

5.2 The *Conversation* event

Establishing the *Conversation*

The topic *Whose heritage is worth saving?* was developed by the 936 ABC Hobart *Drive* team, presenter Louise Saunders and producer Sarah Gillman. In interview, Saunders said it was an opportunity to dig deeper into some of the ongoing tensions about development in the Tasmania’s capital city (Saunders, interview, 16.9. 13). She wanted it to be a ‘constructive and informative debate’ rather than simply reportage and interviews with those involved with controversies and developments like the Brighton Bypass and 10 Murray Street.

The topic was decided about three weeks before the broadcast date of the twenty-first of May, allowing time for the team to do research, make technical arrangements and identify and book sources. Once the topic was approved by the Content Director Lou Garnier, radio production of promoting the conversation started a fortnight before the event. This involved on-air promotion, followed by information being posted about the event on the station website and via social media: 'If heritage is about the past – what will we want to save in the future?' (ABC, 2013d). There was an open invitation on the station's web page for people to interact online with the issue before the event, and to attend the broadcast event at the ABC Centre, a large building at the centre of Hobart. The webpage featured a photograph of the controversial red awnings discussed earlier and underneath the image was a link for people to leave questions, thoughts, and observations ahead of the event. On air and online people were encouraged to suggest questions for the forum and follow the conversation on Facebook and Twitter, using the hashtag #taschat.

In interviews, ABC content makers said the criteria for source selection included identifying a few participants with expert knowledge of heritage and cultural management and those who had authentic experience with recent heritage tensions experienced in Southern Tasmania. Saunders and Gillman both said in interview that they were also mindful of the ABC's strategic imperative to strive for a diversity of voices wherever editorially relevant and possible, representative of age, gender, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. As part of its research, the team reviewed electronic and print media coverage in the past five years, analysis of government and industry reports and viewed online sources like Heritage Tasmania. Analysis of the ABC's coverage of development issues was conducted by a review of television, radio and online news archives and through searching the ABC Radio program rundown system, which catalogues details from the past few years about who has appeared on what program, when and why.

Saunders and Gillman divided the tasks of contacting and booking guests between them. Save10Murray activist Briony Kidd, a Hobart film maker and playwright was invited to participate in the forum on the basis of her high-profile involvement in the 10 Murray Street campaign. As a former casual employee of the ABC, she is also personally known to both content makers and is a proven articulate and well-informed community activist. Saunders said it was also important to add a young female voice to the discussion, to reflect diversity in the community. Gillman sought to engage someone from the Aboriginal community: ‘...We added someone from the Aboriginal community ’cause I feel that a lot of that heritage is neglected in Tasmania’ (Gillman, interview, 16.09.13). Gillman is a member of the ABC’s Indigenous Working Group, which is committed to improving representation of Indigenous people internally within the organisation and meeting ABC content objectives in relation to respect, relationships, and content. She sought guidance from a senior unnamed member of the Tasmanian Indigenous community about who would be appropriate ‘talent’, and was referred to Aboriginal Heritage Officer, Aaron Everett. As the TAC’s nominated spokesman during the Brighton Bypass protest, Everett had an established media profile, but according to the ABC Radio electronic rundown system had only been on the *Drive* program once before this *Community Conversation*. Gillman said his grassroots experience as a member of the community was the leading criteria for his inclusion:

I think what makes this different is that they often hear ordinary people talking about their experiences or having a genuine conversation and voicing the ideas or their interests or opinions that they have and so you’re not getting, you know, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs saying, ‘This is what we’re doing for Aboriginal heritage’. We’re actually getting a Tasmanian Aboriginal Heritage Officer and a member of that community saying, ‘This is what’s happening, these are the challenges’. (Gillman, interview, 16.09.13)

Authenticity of experience is cited by Gillman as an important factor for selection of Everett as a source. However, Everett represents more than just his cultural background and knowledge about Aboriginal heritage in this context. He was a prominent protester in the Brighton campaign against the government's infrastructure development and arrested three times by Tasmania Police. His role and that of the TAC's in this dispute was nationally recognised in 2011 with commendations from the Governor-General (Anti-Discrimination Commissioner Tasmania, 2012). The leading alternative Tasmanian Aboriginal group, TRACA, was not formally in existence at the time of *Community Conversation* and was therefore not an option for content makers to approach.

Gillman also invited Warwick Oakman, at the suggestion of an unnamed representative of the National Trust who recommended his expertise and knowledge. Oakman is an architectural historian and antiques dealer, who at the time was advising the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery amongst other clients on colonial furniture and art. He had not been on ABC Radio before the *Community Conversation*. President of the Tasmanian Real Estate Institute, Adrian Kelly, was included on basis of research known to the producers showing heritage listings in the past have been a hindrance to selling or developing properties. Kelly is a regular spokesman in the local media on property matters, building regulations and fluctuations of the property market. He had appeared on *Drive* once before and again, was known as an adept media performer. Paul Johnston, convenor of the Significant Buildings Committee at the Australian Institute of Architects and advisory architect to the Works Committee of the Tasmanian Heritage Council was selected by the team on the basis of his expert knowledge of heritage, housing, community and planning management. Johnston had appeared on ABC Radio the previous year when he won a national award, however that interview was not on the *Drive* program. Chair of the Heritage Council, Dianne Snowden, was asked to represent the state's leading authority for heritage management. In interview, she said limited media experience

made her apprehensive about participating, especially given it would mean being face-to-face with several adversaries from previous controversies. Gillman did not find Snowden's reluctance surprising: 'They had been burned over the red awnings issue. So, they were like, "Oh, why would we want to put someone up there and everyone's going to attack us over being worried about trivia"' (Gillman, interview, 16.09.13). Given Gillman's reassurance that the *Community Conversation* was not intended to be a confrontational forum, Snowden said she elected to participate in the hope of increasing public awareness of heritage and the pressures of trying to manage it (Snowden, interview, 21.11.13).

All participants were informed about who else was involved, what points the discussion would likely canvas and the order of appearance. Speaking in broad terms about guest selection – or 'talent' as guests are frequently referred to in the media industry – Saunders described in interview that identifying talent with competent verbal skills to engage in the longer *Community Conversation* format was a criterion for selection. As a presenter, she said she needed to be thoughtful about inclusion and fair opportunity during her moderation of the event. To sustain the programming flow, she said guests and presenter need to be able to interact and perform:

...You could have five people individually who'd all tell very good stories but if they don't work together as a unit over the course of the hour, work with each other and feed off each other, then the program's not going to work. (Saunders, interview, 16.09.13)

These comments by Saunders highlight an awareness of the importance of interactivity and establishing equal power relations between guests to ensure their confident engagement and participation. To support these aims, Gillman spoke at length with guests via telephone to explore the issues, establish their views, to inform them of Saunders' proposed line of questioning and other operational information. The preparation, and extra load of research,

added several hours more to their workflow in the weeks ahead of the event. It also raises questions about what support and encouragement non-adept media performers may need to enable their voices heard, which will be discussed later.

The *Conversation* logistics

The *Community Conversation: Whose heritage is worth saving?* was held in Hobart on 21 May 2013 and it was promoted on-air and online by this line: ‘Hobart is known for its colonial buildings and heritage value, but what does *‘heritage value’* actually mean and are we saving the *‘right’* things?’ (ABC, 2013d). The forum was hosted by 936 ABC Hobart *Drive* presenter Saunders, and was produced by Gillman. Key ABC staff also involved were Content Director, Lou Garnier; multiplatform editor Carol Raabus; and marketing manager Kathy Gates and operations co-ordinator, John Lemm. On the day of the broadcast, all guests met with Saunders, Gillman, and Garnier for 15 minutes before commencement of the recording and were shown the configuration of the conversation setting and given the chance to ask any questions. The ‘rules of engagement’, as explained by the program team, were brief and included the running order of guests and encouragement for guests to consider the option of asking questions of each other, or comment on responses, in a respectful manner during the live broadcast. The guests were also made welcome to watch the proceedings with members of the public and ABC staff in the corner of the room whenever they weren’t directly involved with the conversation. In keeping with the ABC’s intention to hold these forums away from a studio setting, the *Community Conversation* was broadcast outside the radio studios but still in part of the ABC Broadcast Centre in Hobart’s CBD, in the historic sandstone section of the building which was built in 1876 as the Hobart Railway station. The seating configuration was deliberately designed to create a less confrontational setting, aiding a fluidity between the host broadcaster and guests. Two panellists were chosen to help the presenter ‘anchor’ proceedings throughout

the entire program. These ‘anchor’ panellists, Oakman and Johnston, were seated in a semi-circle in comfortable tub-style chairs facing Saunders with the remaining chair to the left of Louise Saunders occupied by the interchange guests in this order: Kidd, Snowden, Everett and Kelly. Participants could see each other and were free to gesticulate with their hands if so desired yet still be technically supported with microphones and stands for broadcast quality audio. This configuration also allowed minimal disruption to the core group on air as the interchange guests took their position. There were approximately eight members of the public seated and three ABC staff including this observer seated in a corner of the room, behind Johnston and Oakman. Onlookers did not disrupt the broadcast and there was limited interaction with guests, other than polite acknowledgement. Between Saunders and the guest panellists was a small, low table with a jug of water and glasses.

As an observer to this event, it appeared this seating configuration of guests and physical audience provided a more comfortable and more everyday social experience where participants could be less distracted by studio equipment, have face-to-face interaction and read each other’s body language. Lemm had sole technical responsibility and control over proceedings and was situated with the studio console behind the Saunders’ chair, giving him line of sight of the group, overview of the equipment on a table in front of him and yet was able to still move quickly across the room to attend to any issues that may arise. He had his chance in the opening minutes when one of the stand microphones failed during Warwick Oakman’s opening comments. A microphone was positioned on a stand in front of each of the guests and Louise Saunders was wearing a headset microphone, which allowed her to move her head as she threw questions and comments to her left, to the two guests panellists in front of her and also allowed her to swivel around and communicate with technical producer Lemm whenever need be. From my observation of the discussion as it unfolded, participants were courteous and respectful of each other, moving and chatting casually during the breaks.

The order of guests reflected a rough framework of discussion, linked to central key controversies and themes, mapped out loosely in Louise Saunders' mind. She said maintaining a rigid plan would not help the 'flow of the conversation' for a radio audience:

...You listen to what the other people are saying and you react and respond to what they're saying and that, I suppose, is largely an innate skill now but it's probably key to making people listen for the course of the 55 minutes. (Saunders, interview, 16.09.13)

In the above quotation, Saunders highlights the importance of listening and a strong professional awareness of the dual purposes of this *Community Conversation* event: to not only effectively engage participants but also provide a worthwhile listening experience for audience, either hearing the broadcast live or later, via online on demand.

The broadcast event

The program started at 16.05pm after the ABC news headlines and was simultaneously broadcast live on analogue on 936 ABC Hobart and via digital platforms, enabling listeners to also listen online. The discussion was introduced by a mixture of voices; vox populi from Hobart's streets on an audio 'bed', namely voices mixed with music. It was slow and ornate baroque music, with the responses to the answer *What does heritage mean to you?* The use of a mix of voices was to give listeners a sense of the issue's complexity but its primary purpose was not editorial, rather as an audio tool to provide variety and texture to the broadcast. The broadcast opened with Saunders briefly explaining the wide context encompassed in the question about whose heritage is worth saving and introducing guest anchor panellists, Johnston and Oakman. She then previewed or, to use industry speak 'forward promoted' the others – Kidd, Snowden, Everett and Kelly – who would join the trio later that hour. Saunders detailed Kidd's association with the Save 10 Murray campaign and also declared that Kidd had

worked at the public broadcaster in the past. This editorial declaration was made by Saunders to avoid any potential perceptions of conflict of interest. Saunders then encouraged Johnston and Oakman to share what they perceived as important with heritage, before bringing Kidd in to talk in more detail about Save 10 Murray experience and her views on heritage with them for approximately 11 minutes. The dialogue was interrupted at that point with some ‘imaging’, namely branding music and program identification. This was followed by Saunders ‘resetting’ the conversation – the radio craft discipline of providing the time, recapping the context of this conversation, repeating her name and that of the station and then re-introducing the program guests. This is a commonly deployed to ensure listeners who may tune in or log on at any point of the live broadcast are aware of what is happening, with whom and where. The conversation shifted from architecture to the value of objects before Snowden joined the conversation. She firstly attempted to clarify the purpose and membership of the council before the discussion focused on differing perspectives about what establishes a sense of Tasmanian identity with heritage. At 16.32pm, the broadcast paused for news headlines. The conversation was resumed with another compile of vox pops before another introduction from Louise Saunders, ‘resetting’ the program. This deliberate interruption to the event was designed for the ABC to meet its News commitments and to provide time for guests to have a drink and a moment to reflect. There was little opportunity for much conversation amongst the group but Saunders quickly explained how the next part of the discussion would unfold. When back on air, the group shared views on effective models of heritage management and how younger and more members of the community should be better engaged with the more modern aspects of preserving heritage. After approximately ten minutes of participation, Snowden focused on the controversy of the red awnings and how it highlighted why public discourse and knowledge needs to be wider and richer. Everett was then introduced to the conversation event with a question about whether the legislation which provides for the protection of Aboriginal heritage is adequate. The discussion

then shifted between parties to the role that government generally plays in balancing development with heritage protection. Adrian Kelly joined the *Community Conversation* for five minutes before it finished thirty seconds before the 1700 News bulletin.

Discourse features of the *Community Conversation*

In the introduction, Saunders established the genre of the discussion as an open, inclusive local forum without a clear editorial agenda or objective: ‘We don’t guarantee to come up with the answers today’. She posed a series of questions, suggesting a multitude of views would likely surface in the next hour and encouraged interaction via talkback and social media: ‘I Googled the question, ‘what is heritage’, and you get everything from various dictionary definitions to essays and longer treaties that have been written as to what is heritage. Perhaps the answers are different in every case’ (Saunders, *CC*, 21.5.13). Rhetorical features of openness are indicative of an active style of curiosity, positioning the order of discourse equally with the listener and encouraging the listener to interact online. Saunders frames the discussion as a neutral open-ended exchange amongst a variety of people, experts and community activists, about the management and future of Hobart’s heritage. Evidence of this is detected in the frequent use of the word ‘perhaps’ (three times in her introduction) suggestive of her not having a fixed view, using open-ended questions and making an effort with each guest to allow them to individually express what heritage means to them or what their views on specific issues are, as shown in this exchange with Warwick Oakman:

LS: Warwick what are your thoughts?

WO: Mine are quite different.

LS: That’s welcome in a conversation.

This supportive and exploratory approach of Saunders seemed to this observer to relax guests and boost their preparedness to share information, facilitate engagement and encourage them to raise alternative viewpoints. Analysis of discourse features demonstrate frequent affirmations and reflective listening from the presenter. Saunders' tone is reasonable and considered as opposed to confrontational, suggestive of a civically-framed approach to assess why there is a tradition of conflict associated with development and exploration of possible solutions. Evidence that guests were prepared to sponsor this civic framing, to varying degrees is reinforced by the cohesion that emerges from Saunders and each of the panel members on the importance of more public knowledge and community engagement about heritage issues throughout the conversation: 'We look at heritage and embrace the term and try to understand what it means' (Saunders); 'As our knowledge increases, so does our understanding'; 'All of those things are collectively ours' (Oakman); 'Heritage is one of those tangible links that we can actually share together as a community' (Johnston); 'We've been talking about education...it's a really hard one to push across to the wider community' (Everett); and 'Very sad we don't, we haven't been having, those real debates about the actual cultural values and what we should be protecting and the layers of history and meaning and all of that' (Kidd). Each of the participants uses the collective pronoun; 'we', 'us', in most of these comments, suggestive of a consensus that heritage management is important issue, a shared experience and responsibility.

However, all participants in this conversation are strategic participants and therefore their strategic communicative action, through various frames, warrants closer examination. In an analysis of discourse features of the *Community Conversation* text, the word 'community' appears 28 times in the event (excluding its use as part of the program title). There are different perceptions of who and what community actually is and what level of engagement may individuals feel towards the concept. Next is the word 'value', mentioned 15 times and

‘understanding’, ten times. This pattern of cohesion can arguably be linked to the values and evidence of civic framing discussed earlier. Most references to ‘community’ were from Johnston, primarily framed in discourse suggestive of social inclusion and engagement: ‘Heritage is one of those things that effectively as a community we value’; ‘Shared together as a community’; ‘Part of a health community’; and ‘Every community has the right to understand’. These phrases advance his advocacy for greater social inclusion and diversity in decision making about heritage issues. Closer examination of both Oakman’s and Everett’s use of the word ‘community’ also reveals strategic action. For historian Warwick Oakman, the word ‘community’ is used in the context of it being an entity clearly separate from government, portrayed by him as an active force which, he claims, is an entity more motivated towards heritage protection than usually portrayed: ‘Many people who are in the community are further along the path than a lot of the people in government who are making those decisions’ (Oakman, *CC*, 21.05.13).

The word ‘community’ is used by Everett to highlight a different ‘us and them’ and social and political with frequent mentions of the Aboriginal community being separate to the ‘wider community’. Much of Everett’s discourse is framed to advance advocacy on two central issues; achieving more recognition for the TAC from government and advancing broader community understanding about aboriginal cultural rights. He frequently refers to his people’s ‘ongoing battle’, in relation to both government management of Aboriginal matters and his frustration about the level of public awareness: ‘It’s a really hard thing to put across so that we can protect something like that if a wider community don’t understand it’. This demonstrates Everett’s attempt to reframe previous media conflict frames discussed earlier this chapter in relation to the Brighton bypass. He attempts to shift perceptions that the Aboriginal community is anti-development by expressing obligation modality; an aspect of identification is what people commit themselves to in what they say in respect to obligation or what should be:

We want to be progressive in the sense of being able to assess areas before a development is looked at...they'll already have some kind of management plan that's been done up on that area so then they can focus on how they can develop in progressing. (Everett, CC, 21.05.13)

This campaign by Everett for Aboriginal heritage assessment by TAC to be prioritised advances both the organisation's political interests and is close to Everett's own professional concern as a former heritage assessment officer. Using the example of artefacts at the Brighton bypass, Everett continues with persuasive strategy for greater cultural protection by highlighting potential economic potential, particularly for the burgeoning tourism industry: 'You'd think that close to Hobart, you want to protect that for all different values from Aboriginal side of it to you know, highlight it for tourism.'

The word 'funding' appears only once in the entire discussion, an unexpected silence in this *Community Conversation*, as it is often at the heart of tensions over development or preservation. Potential reasons for this will be discussed later in this chapter. What did emerge from each participant were persuasive strategies through conflict management frames. For example, Johnston praises the emergence of a diversity of younger voices, particularly from grassroots organisations, joining the public debate or getting involved in campaigns like 10 Murray:

...It is about creating a value judgement for a broader understanding of society - young people as well as Indigenous groups, as well as architects and other professional organisations. (Johnston, CC, 21.05.13)

Part of Johnston's agenda for a greater diversity of voices to be heard on heritage includes this appeal for more political and community recognition for Aboriginal heritage:

I think it's a really crucial understanding of our own origins and that we better communicate with the Aboriginal community as well as actually elevate the status of the community within the decision-making process. (Johnston, CC, 21.05.13)

Johnston's advocacy is strengthened by use of an obligation modality that it 'Should actually be highly resourced' and it 'should be done effectively through cultural tourism', sponsoring framing established earlier by Everett. Another key phrase identified in the text of Indigenous participant Everett, consistent with Johnston's conflict management frame, is that the Aboriginal community needs a greater voice: 'It's all looked at from a government perspective rather than dealing with it from a community side'. This truth modality advances his agenda-setting:

We look at it different from in terms of we believe where it belongs and where it come from is where it's got meaning to a place rather you know being hidden or taken away or stuck in a museum. (Everett, CC, 21.05.13)

Everett's perspective on the protection of place and Indigenous artefacts links back to the TAC's political agenda to gain control of all aspects of Indigenous heritage management. Persuasive strategy by Briony Kidd, consistently reinforcing the importance of 10 Murray Street's architectural and cultural significance, advances her advocacy framing. Just one way this is done is by casting aspersions on the developers for ignoring the group's proposal for redevelopment: 'So cavalier with resources' and 'It does annoy me when I see something that I think is wasteful'. Kidd employs a conflict management frame to encourage people to take more interest in modern heritage preservation, but implicitly reveals deep personal frustration of challenging the dominant political and economic agenda:

I came into it originally in a very kind of naïve way which was just, ‘oh, you know, I like that building’. ...It has made me very cynical about the whole process. We put a lot of effort into it, we did everything the correct way and then basically the rules got changed on us in the last minute. (Kidd, *CC*, 21.5.13)

Kidd’s cynicism and sense of injustice illustrated in the above quotation is reinforced by the persuasive strategy of painting an evocative and powerful picture of public opportunity lost:

...in another 10 years’ time, I think if that building was still there, people would be going, ‘Oh this is the coolest building in town, let’s go up onto the roof and have some cocktails and pretend we’re in *Madmen*’ or something. But if it doesn’t get that chance to get to that point of being fashionable again, then you know, all of that is lost which is a pity I think. (Kidd, *CC*, 21.5.13)

Kidd’s reference here to the missed opportunity for future generations being denied the chance to appreciate the building is a truth modality consistent with the political and strategic communicative position of the 10 Murray political campaign.

Analysis of discourse features from Dianne Snowden shows she employs civic framing in an attempt to shift perceptions about the Heritage Council and its role in issues management, arguing more ‘public education’ would ease tensions: ‘The conversation needs to go further, it hasn’t and that’s why it’s really good to be here today’ (Snowden, *CC*, 21.05.13). She explicitly attempts to reframe the identity of the Heritage Council, established in the media through issues like the red awnings discussed earlier in this section, stressing that: ‘...One of those misconceptions is that we always say ‘no’. Ninety-six of the works applications last year were approved’, and explains that ‘Its independence does tend to restrict it from being more vocal that what we would probably like it to be but it needs to detach itself from both government and community’. Snowden’s assertions about the role of the Heritage Council are rejected outright by Oakman who denigrates the discourse by extolling the credibility of this argument:

...The Heritage Council...will make decision which are easy but the ones which are difficult to make, they can back down on...the Heritage Council's role, in many ways, is one of government. (Oakman, CC, 21.05.13)

This rejection of the Heritage Council's claims to independence is interestingly one of the few major contradictions to emerge during the conversation, and only after invitation by Saunders for Oakman to comment on Snowden's claims. Snowden employs truth modality to advance the identity framing: 'The Heritage Council prides itself on its independent, although it might seem at times that it is just a rubber stamp for the government, it's not' (Snowden, CC, 21.04.13). While the earlier quotation is Snowden's explicit attempt to reassert identity, it is partially sponsored by Johnston as he seizes an opportunity through obligation modality to offer some advice to the council about improving public engagement:

...Its independence does tend to restrict it from becoming much more vocal than what we would probably like it to be but it needs to detach itself from both government and community...to be able to communicate their decision making a lot better and actually lead discussion rather than letting it actually dwindle within the community.... (Johnston, CC, 21.05.13)

Johnston's perceptions of poor community engagement and the low standard of debate about heritage in the local media, expressed in this quotation, are themes also sponsored during the broadcast by Everett, Kidd and Snowden. Briony Kidd specifically refers to the concept of media framing in the discussion which demonstrates her industry-honed awareness of the approach, adding in interview how Hobart's local media restricted discussion about 10 Murray Street to a narrow contest.

I don't feel that there was ever really a genuine public debate about it...the debate was often simplified in terms of pro-development or anti-development. Like there's, you know, constantly articles in the paper that sort of frame it along those lines and

it's so completely not useful because that's not what we're talking about.... It's not you know who's in favour of progress and building things and who isn't, it's got nothing to do with that. (Kidd, CC, 21.05.13)

Kidd's observations here are a direct criticism of dominant discourse of political and media elite, including the news values and media practices of Hobart's sole daily newspaper, News Corporation's *The Mercury* – as detailed earlier, a champion of the government and business-backed Parliament Square project. Prompted by questions from Saunders about the quality of public debate in local media, Everett also makes explicit reference to his truth modality of a pro-Government and pro-development local media:

It seems to be stuck on that one kind of spot and it's all looked at from a government perspective rather than actually dealing with it from a community side with you know, how to move forward with the protection of Aboriginal heritage (Everett, CC, 21.05.13)

Everett's perspective here is suggestive of a lack of voice for the Indigenous community and inadequate representation in local media:

...A debate's always good I suppose when you're looking at any kind of an issue in terms of what's happening, but when it deals with Aboriginal heritage in the terms of a debate, it's always looked at from an area, as we're saying, we've been talking about education, so then it's really a hard one to push across to the wider community. (Everett, CC, 21.05.13)

In this quotation, Everett evokes the civic framing which surfaced earlier about the need for more education and insight into public policy making. It is sponsored by Johnston who said the lack of Aboriginal input into the dominant political and economic discourse is leading to laws that will further undermine the Government's relationship with the Indigenous community.

I think it's actually going backwards and I think it's because of poor decision making within government that is creating a lot of conflict amongst Tasmanians and I think that needs to be addressed. (Johnston, CC, 21.05.13)

Johnston's call for reform is part of his conflict management framing in the radio forum. Both he and Oakman propose the obligation modality of 'creative leadership', suggesting heritage be prioritised with government funding towards more cultural tourism development. Their cohesion on this demonstrates strategic communicative action at work against current government heritage management priorities.

The *Conversation* online

Whose heritage is worth saving? was supported by Twitter, Facebook and online at the 936-station website (ABC, 2013e). While feedback and suggestions were sought online more than a week before the event, only eight were received. The broadcast and online teams interviewed said they were not surprised as the series in 2013 was at an experimental stage and the ABC's digital relationship with its audience was not as advanced and interactive as it is today. The *Community Conversation* was also promoted online and in social media, particularly amongst a database of relevant interest groups identified by the marketing department. Photos of the broadcast and key points were shared on Facebook and Twitter during and post the event. This was one of the first forays of 936 ABC Hobart into targeted online audience engagement and hence, figures of engagement were relatively low and data capture is limited. There is no data available from Twitter prior to October 2013. After the event, a MP3 of audio of the conversation was also uploaded to the station's web page with links to a few relevant organisations; National Trust, Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre and the Tasmanian Heritage Council. According to *Webtrends* data, there was a total reach of 3534 to this recording on

abc.net.au/Hobart in the first week after its broadcast. This post-event sharing is part of the ABC's strategy to serve audiences on whatever platform it chooses to access content and at a time convenient to them. According to Saunders, developing a digital, educative resource is a central to the *Community Conversation* series: '...If we can provide contact or information or a resource for people to explore something further...then it's always a value back to the listening community (Saunders, interview, 16.09.13).

5.2.1 Participant reflection and impact

Conversation participants

All the participants were approached for interview by this researcher and all, apart from Warwick Oakman agreed to take part in a one-on-one semi-structured interview. A common theme to emerge in the interviews about the *Community Conversation* was the limited standard and extent of public debate in local media, with all participants expressing disappointment about the superficiality of local television, radio, and TV services on offer. Kelly believes there is enormous appetite from the Hobart community to connect in more depth with local matters: 'Tasmanians really do enjoy getting involved in their local communities. They want to know what's going on. They want to have a contribution, which is most of the time positive' (Kelly, interview, 15.11.13). Based on previous media experiences, Kelly said local understanding about issues is frustrated by superficial levels of local media interviews: 'Very short and sharp in most cases, where the interviewer is just after two or three sentences that they can use on the radio, in the news or on the television' (Kelly, interview, 15.11.13). Conflict and controversy, said Snowden, are what tends to attract media focus: 'Heritage only rises in that list when a building is under threat or people are concerned about a particular issue' and then there is only '...An opportunity to do more than a 30 second grab or an interview on you know, the issue of

the day.’ Johnston says this approach of Hobart’s local media restricts debate and limits public knowledge: ‘There’s always confusing things that happen in the media, such as issues around 10 Murray Street, such as red awnings, that rarely address the question, the issues of well, ‘what is heritage now?’’ (Johnston, interview, 14.11.13). Both Johnston and Kidd said legitimate questions about judicial processes were ignored by the media during the 10 Murray Street protest. Kidd said it was hard any getting media interest or understanding in the campaign to respect the architectural value of 10 Murray Street:

There’s a very simplistic narrative that gets played out in the Tasmanian media and anything that is against development is a sort of a fringe, looney kind of group and that their reasons for being against the development tend to be out of the mainstream and kind of selfish in a way; whether it’s save the forest or save a building. ...I felt like often the media, the people I was speaking to didn’t really have time themselves to investigate what was going on. (Kidd, interview, 11.12.13)

Kidd sees the binary nature of local coverage means public debate is stifled by both a lack of community understanding and dominance of elite sources in controlling information flow and public debate. During the 10 Murray Street campaign, Kidd said proponents and opponents were invited to elaborate on their perspectives in opinion pieces for the city’s newspaper *The Mercury*, but viewed that as a restricted form of community education and engagement:

My point is that all of these interest groups are allowed to give their position out there but that’s not really journalism. Like, it’s viewed as lobbying so and it kind of is lobbying and there’s nothing wrong with it in itself but if that’s the only kind of debate that’s happening it’s really limited and really unhelpful. (Kidd, interview, 11.12.13)

What Kidd also found ‘unhelpful’ were her experiences on social media about 10 Murray Street in 2012. Over a period of unspecified weeks in, she said she had twitter exchanges between some unknown people who started out with an account called ‘*destroy 10Murray*.’ Records of

this are not available, as Twitter's archive does not reach back that far. She described it at times to be 'bullying' and said better and more respectful exchanges emerge through longer form, local media forums:

...If you drum up debate about something trivial, people will respond but if you don't, then they're quite happy to actually talk about the real issues. So, I think yeah, there's a huge kind of leadership role that the ABC can play in just sort of steering debate. (Kidd, interview, 11.12.13)

In this quotation, Kidd reveals her knowledge of the ideological values of public broadcasting in Australia and what role she believes public broadcasting should pursue in the current media environment.

Despite Snowden's misgivings about being involved with the broadcast, she said the conduct of the ABC content team gave her confidence the forum would provide the council with a rare opportunity to develop some context and public understanding around heritage issues, and was pleased with the result:

You can actually explore ideas, you can unpick layers of heritage and we don't get to do that very often. We've got a lot of important messages that I think we need to take to the community so there is a better understanding of heritage. (Snowden, interview, 21.11.13)

Snowden acknowledges that the Heritage Council is aware the public does not understand what it does or why, which has contributed to the level of intensity of conflict over issues like the red awnings. A perceived need for more public knowledge about heritage was consistently reiterated throughout the *Conversation*: 'As our knowledge increases, so does our understanding' (Oakman), and that it would improve the quality of debate: 'In a healthier society we would have a real debate at the start...people need to understand the issue before

they can have a real opinion.’ (Kidd). Such consensus and Johnston’s reference that the *Community Conversation* was ‘all positive’ is suggestive, however, of a restrained discussion, mostly avoiding conflict. The exception to this was the contradiction between Snowden and Oakman (and mediated by Saunders), described previously. There are a number of potential factors for this, to be analysed later. Kidd said she was surprised the non-listing of 10 Murray on the heritage register didn’t surface as an issue of discussion as it was a sensitive political issue at the time of the 10 Murray debate but wasn’t prepared to raise during the broadcast: ‘A bit scared cause I don’t know exactly where the boundaries are’ and the ‘way we operate here, it’s very difficult to be honest about things’ (Kidd, interview, 11.12.13). Kidd said that people in Hobart often felt restrained about speaking out on local issues as it may affect local employment prospects, particularly for professionals: ‘There’s certain things he’s not going to say on air, on radio or he won’t be able to get work in that area’. These statements prompt questions about small communities, local media and level of citizen interact with dominant political and economic forces. In interview, Everett said he was not granted sufficient time in the broadcast event to discuss broader legislative concerns, arguing the TAC does not get a fair public hearing in the media or broader community:

...From a community point of view, we still ain’t able to get our point out there. The government’s now kind of taken it upon themselves to take full control of our heritage and actually if anything we’re actually losing rights on our heritage. It’s really, as things are going, we seem to be going backwards, not forwards. (Everett, interview, 18.11.13)

This reference to a lack of recognition exhibit ideological frustration from the TAC linked to the contested history of aboriginality in Tasmania and indeed, ongoing power contests within the community itself. Regardless, Everett said participation in the *Community Conversation* was in some ways helpful in educating a wider audience about the TAC’s concerns.

...Like people are starting to understand that it's not just people whinging about something, it's people trying to actually educate people on what our problems are and you know we're trying to work with people rather than trying to negatively you know cut people from our heritage, trying to make people more understanding and have that education on what our problems are. (Everett, interview, 18.11.13)

This repeated reference to 'education' from Everett returns focus to expectations that local media should play not only an informative and entertaining role in a community, but also an educative one. Like all the participants interviewed, Everett expressed preference for the live, face-to-face interaction during the radio. Most said the setting engendered confidence and comfort. For Dianne Snowden, it meant she could monitor body language and feel more confident about expressing her views: 'Oh body language is a real, really important part of any conversation. So, you know, you're looking for clues to see whether, what, how people are responding to the message that you're giving' (Snowden, interview, 21.11.13).

Kidd said live radio makes people more accountable:

...So you can't just say some wise crack and then go offline. But also if you're face to face with someone, then you have to kind of treat them a bit like a human being and it's harder to just have this really hard-line position where you know, 'you're all crackpots and we're all amazing', so I think, yeah, it's sort of a respectful discussion where people are encouraged to actually tease out their arguments rather than just, 'I'm for this and you're for that'... (Kidd, interview, 11.12.13)

This endorses live face-to-face interactions as more conducive to respectful and constructive discussions than online settings. Hearing emotion too, said Kelly, gives radio more power and impact: 'Being able to hear different tones in people's voices you know, being able to hear anger or being able to hear happiness, cause you can't do any of that online' (Kelly, interview, 15. 11.13).

In interview, the diversity of sources involved in the forum was noted by all participants, though Snowden suggests an additional voice – that of the National Trust – would have been constructive. (The Trust, which manages many historic properties, is a key stakeholder for the Council. However, as discussed earlier, the Trust had nominated Warwick Oakman to represent its interests). Guests indicated how the inclusion of diverse points of view helped stimulate alternative viewpoints, sponsoring the conflict management frame asserted by Johnston during the discussion: ‘We need to appreciate diversity...many people wouldn’t understand what social inclusion actually meant’. In interview, Johnston expresses regret that there are few public avenues for a mix of voices from a variety of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds to join debates on policies that affect social conditions in Hobart, apart from the occasional University or City Council forum.

...So there’s a lot of ground to be had in terms of articulating these things in a manner that people can understand so yeah, it’s not just a broader level of the population, it’s at the upper levels as well, where basic ideas are not well understood and as a result they don’t become part of economic or social equations that happen. (Johnston, interview, 14.11.13)

This comment from Johnston again draws attention to how restrictions on a diversity of voices can restrict civic knowledge and political understanding. Everett refers to the dominance of political elite in public debate: ‘It’s all coming from a political background and they’re just pushing their point because of their job’ (Everett, interview, 18.11.13). However, it must be noted that as a spokesman for the TAC, Everett also had a ‘job’ in this *Community Conversation* – to advance public understanding of Indigenous concerns.

On journalistic practice, Snowden pointed out that the transparency of intent from Gillman and Saunders was critical to her engagement. It was assisted, she said, by the facilitation of Saunders who was: ‘even, even handed. She was fair and she was encouraging’. Johnston said

the way Saunders directed the flow of conversation also created engagement amongst participants: ‘...There’s a certain dynamic that you build and you have people, not necessarily opposing each other but starting to actually spin off each other and I think potentially that’s obviously the skills on how’s it’s co-ordinated’ (Johnston 14.11.13).

Conversation content makers

In order to facilitate a comfortable exchange from the event’s sources, the ABC content team deliberately removed presenter Saunders from the studio to what was described by Garnier as a: ‘lounge room’ situation. Saunders said not being technically in control of the situation as she normally is in the radio studio changes the dynamics of interaction:

I think it’s a greater sense of comfort in, or comfortableness in the company of everyone who’s there, whether it’s the other guests or whether it’s me that you’re not under scrutiny to justify your opinions and beliefs but that you’re able to share experiences and get an honest reaction rather than having to be you know, interrogated about it. (Saunders, interview, 16.09.13)

A more comfortable setting, she said, encouraged people to be more relaxed and forthcoming with their perspectives. Marketing manager Kathy Gates observed greater participation between participants and Saunders: ‘It’s not combative, it’s not a contest, ever, either between her and another person or between some of the discussion, some of the participant...I do think that is, that people quite like to hear that’ (Gates, interview, 14.01.14). Part of the reason, said Garnier, was Saunders’ capacity to listen and engage effectively: ‘You have to be prepared to throw away the interview and go with the flow. Listening is exceptionally important to broadcasters and those more proficient at interviews are better at it’ (Garnier, interview, 15.01.14). In interview, Saunders said she was surprised that there was little tension amongst the group: ‘Funnily enough it was a love fest really which can surprise you cause you think

you have people sometimes who are coming from polar positions'. What she identified was the emergence of consensus on some fronts: 'A common theme which again is something you wouldn't get if you interviewed them separately you might continue to think that they had opposing views. Put them together, with a two, three, or four-way conversation, and you can discover common themes which is actually really interesting' (Saunders, interview, 16.09.13). Multiplatform reporter, Carol Raabus, said anecdotal feedback and audience insights indicated the audience wants, and needs, longer local discussions about such controversial issues:

They want to know, you know, what are their neighbours are up to, what's happening down the street and they don't get it in other media with, particularly commercial media they sort of attempt it but they, it doesn't make a lot of money to do hyperlocal stories. I think there's a real benefit in building a history and commentary on really local stuff that's going on that otherwise just sort of disappears and people don't really cover it. (Raabus, interview, 14.01.14)

In this observation, Raabus demonstrates ideological commitment aligned with public service media's commitment to a type of local media coverage, not available on commercial outlets or online and sees it contributing to community history, understanding and education. Such interaction, she said, shifts perceptions and boosts social cohesion:

...Maybe the Aboriginal Heritage debate going back to the conversation, it's something that will be in the news headlines, 'Oh there's, those Aboriginals are protesting again', but actually giving them a chance to explain what that means, what effect that has on their even day to day lives, gives people a chance to actually understand what's going on...I think the more people understand each other, the less problems you have with racism and you know, exclusion of people. (Raabus, interview, 14.01.14)

Journalism's role in advancing social change, developing tolerance and social inclusion is also noted by Gillman, who said in today's media landscape, generating and facilitating community engagement aligned by the ABC Charter is even more valuable:

...It allows us to go back to our audience and back to our communities, and for the ABC as a public broadcaster, to say, 'We're not just telling you what you should think, we're finding out what you think, what you're talking about and we're facilitating a community wide discussion', and I guess in doing so, giving it some, not legitimacy but saying, 'These are important issues to you that may not be coming to the media' which is increasingly having to rely on press releases and emails and PR stuff and that type of thing. And it really gives ordinary people a chance to have their say and I think it's quite empowering for people as well. (Gillman, interview, 16.09.13)

These comments raise three interesting points about the ABC format: that it seeks out what people are thinking, facilitates a discussion that may not be had elsewhere, and provides platform for *some* underrepresented voices to be heard.

While it is contestable that a diversity of voices was heard in this event, Garnier makes the point that the team had to do extra research and invest several hours of additional work to achieve and engage the talent who were involved. She said in interview that allocating more resources to do this sort of community collaboration is necessary. She sees it as a priority to hear from underrepresented voices and reflect diversity, particularly with cultural communities: 'I think it's up to us and we're starting to do this as a station, to get out into the community. They're not going to knock on our door, you know, we need to actually to reach out' (Garnier, interview, 15.01.14). In interview, the then ABC Managing Director, Mark Scott said initiatives like *Community Conversations* is a way to enable more people's perspectives to be heard on social and political matters on the public broadcaster:

...Our elected officials are merely representatives of all these other voices so let's go direct to all these other voices. But in hearing them, I hope we have deeper understanding really of what, of what motivates people, what drives people, what they're frightened of. I think this is a challenge for broadcasting organisations like ours. (Scott, interview, 24.5.13)

Tackling the challenge of seeking and reflecting more diversity is integral to fostering more social inclusion and is priority work for the public broadcaster, as identified Scott in 2013 and current Managing Director Michelle Guthrie in 2017.

Aftermath

The ABC *Drive* program team received a small amount of feedback via social media and anecdotally from the community after the program, congratulating them on an 'interesting' and 'non-combative' discussion of heritage issues. There were no complaints received by ABC Management and no adverse feedback about fifty minutes of the *Drive* program being dedicated to exploring a single issue in this special broadcast.

The objective of engaging and informing the public about heritage tensions and management in this special broadcast was, according to both content makers and participants, achieved to varying degrees of satisfaction, dependent on what participants sought to gain from it. Everett said there should be more forums like it: 'The more that opportunities like this come up gives us the option to you know, educate people more widely within the community to start acknowledging heritage, Aboriginal Heritage' (Everett, interview, 18.11.13). He said radio discussions enabled him to get the TAC's viewpoint across efficiently as it provided a more direct and interactive forum than TV, press or social media to explain the complexity of protecting and managing cultural heritage at the local level: 'I think that with these kind of discussions, everyone's saying what they want to say and answering.'

In interview, Kidd said that despite limitations to the discussion, it was relief to shift away from binary public debate. Reinforcing research by Coleman (2012), she contends the Tasmanian community is equipped and has an appetite to listen to and engage in more complex public discourse: ‘...When there’s a more thoughtful discussion, people actually do enjoy it because they don’t like being sort of pigeon holed into these really simplistic categories like pro-development, anti-development’ (Kidd, interview, 11.12.13). She also noted that having the resource online provided a useful resource for education and archival reference. Having this resource online proved immediately useful for Snowden. It was accessed after and shared after the event by members of the Heritage Council and connected community organisations, which made a point of listening to the full conversation and discussing it amongst their own members, however the nature of these conversations is not known.

Kelly also shared the link with the Institute’s membership, attracting some positive feedback about how the more nuanced discussion helped improve public understanding and knowledge about some of the past heritage controversies in Hobart. Kelly said that meeting Snowden face to face and establishing some mutual ground during the *Community Conversation* established a relationship between the organisations:

...I think that was a real benefit that came out of that day...since then I’ve been to a couple of different functions and meetings that they’ve invited me to, so, all of a sudden there’s as result of that afternoon, all these barriers were removed so. And that was a really positive thing because the two organisations really do work hand in hand in so many areas. (Kelly, interview, 15.11.13)

The development of some form of relationship between two key organisations dealing with heritage was hailed by both groups as a constructive development, as Kelly highlights they do share consensus on some matters despite being previously cast by the media to be in conflict

over development matters. Having active consensus on some matters, therefore, is providing the groups with a better platform to explore their differences and navigate ongoing tensions. Feedback from the Aboriginal community, said Everett, was that *Community Conversation* had increased public awareness of cultural heritage issues by ‘not looking at it as a negative’ and shifted the public’s focus away from standard conflict-based media coverage: ‘It makes them more understanding rather than just putting that brick wall up straight away thinking that you know we’re out there just trying to you know stir the pot so to speak’ (Everett, interview, 18.11.13). One example of greater awareness, referred to by Everett, came from Kelly who said that until hearing Everett’s perspective on cultural heritage, he had limited knowledge:

I hadn’t given too much consideration to Aboriginal heritages as part of heritage in terms of property, but maybe that’s because I’m a city dweller too...rather than out in regional parts of Tassie too much. (Kelly, interview, 15.11.13).

The declaration that Aboriginal heritage was not more of a consideration is somewhat surprising given Kelly’s professional role, leading the state’s top property body. This researcher was unable to establish deeper qualification about the statement.

Gillman said anecdotal and some social media feedback, again not recorded, showed the event had generated local goodwill towards toward the ABC and its role in the local community:

I think a lot of people are talking about how the ABC is not just in a token way, but committed to hearing from the community and wanting to know what’s going on. And so I found myself just, when I’ve phoned up people since to try and organise someone, that there’s a better reception, yeah, and that people seem to think that, yeah, we’re genuinely, and I think a lot of that, having an online presence really helps as well because people can go online and see that, ‘okay what they’re saying is what you get’, type of thing. (Gillman, interview, 16.09.13)

This account, albeit only based on anecdotal evidence, highlights a sense of appreciation for the public broadcaster's commitment to create opportunities for members of the Hobart community to speak and be heard, and public support for the public broadcaster's collaborative activities, particularly the value of the online resource available online on-demand after the broadcast date.

The content team decision decided to attempt to proceed with *Community Conversations* each month. Several areas were identified for future improvement; the requirement for more time away from daily show production to deepen research and make more effort to identify and bring new voices into the events. Technically, the station decided to upgrade its microphones to use in the events – equipping all participants with headphone with microphones, dubbed by ABC staff as 'Madonna mikes' after the famous UK singer. This would reduce physical restrictions on movement posed by microphone stands and enhance efforts to create a more natural, relaxed setting for participants.

5.3 Discussion

An analysis of the data reveals insights for answering two of my key research questions. This section will firstly examine what the analysis reveals about why it matters that citizens can be involved in local radio conversations. The discussion will then shift to exploring what this *Community Conversation* reveals about if and how public broadcasting radio can support democratic decision-making.

Built, cultural and natural heritage in Southern Tasmania is generally framed by local media in Tasmania to be dogged by conflict and controversy, a binary contest of ideas, which has been shown to deter potential investment in the economically vulnerable State. *Community Conversation: Whose heritage is worth saving?* on ABC Radio provided a journalism-as-conversation for stakeholders and activists to explore heritage issues in a collaborative

discussion forum, rather than simply react to the press release, PR, or email lobbying, which drives a lot of contemporary news media behaviour, as noted by Gillman. Pro-development campaigns sponsored by Government were shown by analysis of media texts to be frequently reinforced through the market liberal ideologies of News Corporation and Fairfax, who run key Tasmanian newspapers and actively campaign for more development and investment. As revealed in the literature review, focusing attention on the traditional (privileged) while silencing difference and dissent are key criticisms of the media's influence on democratic openness and the participatory public sphere as: 'the institutions of constitutional freedom are only worth as much as a population makes of them' (Habermas, 1992:7).

While there were restrictions and limitations imposed by source selection, to be discussed later in this section, the event provided an opportunity for heritage specialists, industry groups, heritage control organisations and community activists to engage with matters of mutual, occasionally overtly oppositional, concern. Bridging the expert-public gap through making expert opinion intelligible for citizens is seen as an emerging opportunity for journalism (Charity 1995; Livingstone and Lunt, 1994). Perceptions of a significant deficit public knowledge about built and cultural heritage emerged as a key theme of the broadcast, consistent with previous scholarly research on the deregulation of media systems (Curran et al., 2009). This lack of knowledge was blamed for aggravating conflict and there was consensus amongst participants that debate was restricted and polarising as it was mostly presented through conflict frames, reinforcing research that local media rarely manages to enhance debate on policy beyond reporting conflicts between the parties and most prominent pressure groups (Tiffen, 2004). The impact of previous media conflict framing, according to Everett, elided the concerns of Indigenous people, casting his community as a negative and obstructive social group. Other participants said conflict framing proved to be a barrier to public knowledge and education. Kidd noted: 'People need to understand issues before they can have a real opinion'. Snowden

said: 'The conversation needs to go further, [but] it hasn't', which she said had led to public 'confusion' about the Heritage Council.

Johnston said public trust in development proposals was undermined by people being excluded from getting informed. The lack of citizen engagement with local media, he said, also led to some parts of the community being excluded from government policies: 'Basic ideas are not well understood and as a result they don't become part of economic or social equations that happen.' This raises important points about the imbalance of power in the community. Participants said the lack of opportunity for citizens to learn about, or for experts to be more involved with, debate about heritage management had previously frustrated opportunities to challenge prevailing dominant media discourse which reinforces research about the importance of independent and critical commentary on local issues, making local elites accountable, and provide a forum for the expression of local views on issues of community concerns (Nielsen, 2015a; Currah, 2009; Franklin, 2006; Couldry, 2008; Tiffen, 1994). Community activist Kidd said people who speak up against any development are cast by the media as being part of 'some sort of a fringe, looney kind of group' (Kidd, interview, 11.12.13). She mentioned in interview about not being sure about 'How outspoken you can be without getting into trouble', linking her comments to professional people fearing the consequences of challenging dominant ideologies and putting future employment prospects at risk. This participant vulnerability is consistent with other research and commentary in Tasmania (Boyce, 2017; Beresford, 2015; Fon, 2013; Hay, 1977) about the intimidatory power of dominant political, economic, or cultural forces in the small population. No other references like this were made by other participants, but invoke unsettling questions about self-censorship, passive consensus, and the influence of dominant political and economic ideologies at work in smaller communities. This reinforces research about the importance of independent and critical commentary on local issues, making local elites accountable, and the importance of providing a forum for the

expression of local views on issues of community concerns (Neilsen, 2015a; Currah, 2009; Couldry, 2008; Franklin, 2006; Tiffen, 1994). Saunders was surprised that the broadcast, given the polemic positions of some of the participants, lacked overt tension, suggestive that silencing or pressure to conform can run foul of democratic objectives (Vasilev, 2015). As part of his conflict management frame, Johnston identifies a significant need for wide, inclusive public discourse in Tasmania, a point of consensus sponsored by all participants on the panel. Consensus emerged from all participants during the event that Tasmania lacks informed and nuanced public discourse on heritage matters, adding to contemporary unease about the conditions of local media (Neilsen, 2015a) and approaches of journalists (Sambrook, 2016; Murphy, 2017) to effectively reflect community concerns and diversity. Having all the participants agree to take part in this event meant a level of consensus existed at the outset (Bohman, 1998), restricting what some scholars (see Mouffe, 2000; Moore, 2014) see as the open-endedness in human relations for freedom and integrity. However, as expressed most notably by Kidd, there were instances of passive consensus – particularly the fear about ‘speaking out’ against development in Hobart, as mentioned in the interview by Kidd. Given the history of power exercised by more dominant forces like developers and business owners in Tasmania, this ‘self-censorship’ on such matters can be seen as a key restriction of the *Community Conversation*.

Another key silence was related to funding problems for heritage protection and the lack of advocacy for development proposals. Despite these economic pressures presenting daily challenges to the Heritage Council and the Real Estate Institute respectively, and being at the centre of much previous conflict framing in the media, neither representative raised the powerful pressures. The forum, for unknown reasons, lacked the voice of a developer. With the conception of ‘voice’ as having value and hence providing a way of judging the order of things (Couldry, 2010), it did, however, provide dissent and alternative opinions to dominant

discourse to be aired, not always a given for non-official sources like Kidd or Everett (Manning 2001; Anderson 2000). Both said in interview they were able to provide more context to the controversies and build public awareness about cultural and architectural heritage respectively. This recognition allowed them to contribute their views to policy processes from which they had been hitherto excluded: ‘Consultations where the public is encouraged to feel that they are able to ‘have a say’ with the expectation they will be listened to’ (Firmstone and Coleman, 2015). In sponsoring conflict management frames, Everett attempted to shift some negative public perceptions of the TAC’s lobbying style: ‘We’re trying to work with people rather than negatively you know, cut people from our heritage’ (Everett, interview, 18.11.13).

The inclusion of these voices was aided by ABC staff alignment with the public broadcaster’s organisational values in relation to diversity; Saunders expressing in interview the importance of hearing younger voices (Kidd) and Gillman’s explicit commitment to ambition to raise representation of Indigenous people (Everett). It highlights (Haas, 2007; Lemert, 1991) that journalists have an active participation in democratic processes, particularly at the local level (Pointdexter et al., 2006; Costera Meijer, 2010). While it is challenging to categorically identify how media improves democracy (Tofel 2013), some of practices and values from ABC staff associated with this event therefore did, to a limited degree, enhance democratic ideals (Dahl and Shapiro, 2015) with empowerment of some voices (Grossberg, 1987) demonstrating McNair’s (2009) emphasis on the democracy-enabling roles for the news. It is worth noting that case studies preceded the release of the ABC’s *Equity and Diversity Plan* (ABC 2016c) discussed in Chapter Three, which provides more specific direction to content makers about the inclusion of a diversity of ages and backgrounds. In more contemporary contexts, this provides clearer guidance and expectation about the diversity of voices who participated. Radio’s qualities of ‘liveness’ (Kidd), conveying emotion (Kelly), and providing face-to-face interaction were qualities of the medium, which were reported in post-event interviews with

participants to have strengthened interaction and engagement, enabling improved awareness (UNESCO, 2017). However, media performativity was identified by content makers as criteria for inclusion and as recognition (Honneth, 2007) is a necessary condition for an open and inclusive formative environment, this opens up questions about how this diversity of voice can be practically achieved. Pressures of time and workflow demand on research capacity (Boyer, 2013) were also cited as potential barriers to identifying and engaging with different voices.

The framing approach of Saunders in the *Community Conversation* discourse mostly demonstrated capacity for improving citizenship (Horne, 1994). While she introduced the conversation as an open and educative discussion, in reality, journalists cannot avoid framing because the process begins the moment journalists start to make sense of an event (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997; Gitlin, 1980; Silverstone, 2007). Saunders' discourse features of questions, affirmations and reflective listening then therefore can be viewed as suggestive of civic framing (Smith, 1997): enhancing political knowledge and informing people how to participate (Moy et al., 2004; Lemert, 1981). The civic framing approach deployed by Saunders in the *Conversation* was consistent with consensus from each strategic participant, later expressed in interview, for better public understanding and education about heritage matters – a point of consensus achieved by the group in its very formation. There were frequent references of 'we, us' to a shared experience and community challenge. The civic frame was initially sponsored by participants, though a few also pursued identity (Snowden), advocacy (Kidd and Everett) and conflict management (Johnston, Kidd, Everett) frames to advance their individual or organisational positions.

In its design and intent, therefore, the ABC journalism-as-conversation was consistent with values of public interesting journalism in that news organisations should reinvoke, reconsider, and reformulate the very nature of news making as a process (Anderson, Dardenne, and Killenberg, 1994; Gans, 2010). Transparency from the journalists about the motivation and

conduct of the event (Min, 2015) was key to overcoming Snowden's reluctance to participate, gaining her trust. With open-ended listening exhibited by Saunders and participants, the civic framing approach also sought to capture the complexity of civic dialogue (Smith, 1997), and improve knowledge (Galston, 2001:3). Success of such a shift can be noted in the admission by Kelly, the state's top real estate lobbyist, in that he apparently had never considered the perspective of Aboriginal cultural heritage in business dealings. In this context, the *Community Conversation* did promote and indeed improve, and not merely report on and complain about, the quality of public or civic life (Glasser and Lee, 2002:203). This is shown by Johnston's comment: 'The more you understand something, the more you can understand its importance and significance' (Johnston, CC, 21.05.13). While compromised by limited sources, this was a journalistic effort to not only informing, but weighing the consequences of the policies being enacted with the wider community (Dewey, 1916:5). By committing time, staff, and technical resources to a geographic-specific issue like heritage, it shows a commitment by the ABC to localism and advances democratic ideals of free and independent information for citizens to information and their participation. It resonated with the audience about what is local and why it is relevant (Nielsen, 2015b). Despite its limitations, this event was recognised by participants as an expansion of understanding about the complexity of heritage development and awareness of alternative perspectives, leading to some solid outcomes like Kelly's apparent enhanced awareness of Indigenous heritage concerns and more constructive professional connections between groups and individuals previously cast in conflict frames. The paucity of audience data makes it impossible to gauge more broadly how such local radio exchanges help build social cohesion and identity. Such themes will be closely examined in analysis of the *Community Conversation: Disability in Education*, the focus of Chapter Six.

CHAPTER SIX

Community Conversation: Disability in Education

6.1 The issue

Few issues in education generate more discussion, confusion, or apprehension than the topic of inclusion of students with disabilities. It is an issue that has outspoken advocates on all sides, whether against inclusion, staunchly for, or somewhere in between. International evidence indicates that good practice in inclusive education involves consideration of a range of aspects and the key approaches adopted in Australia focus on whole-school practice and in-class support. In a report for the Australian Government for Education, the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) said in-class support includes differentiating curriculum or introducing alternative curricula, the application of universal design, use of information technologies, individual planning through the individual education plan (and a focus on quality teaching) for all students. Nonetheless, it found there is a lack of evidence-based data on the impact of these practices on changes in learning outcomes for students with disability (ARACY, 2013). Among concerns (Tornillo, 1994), is that inclusion may leave classroom teachers without the resources, training, and other supports necessary to teach students with disabilities in their classrooms. As a result, disabled children are not getting specialised support and regular students face disruption to their education. Some disability groups, like many in the deaf community, argue inclusion is often inappropriate because it discourages forms of communication amongst peers and can hinder social development (Cohen, 1994).

However, inclusive schools are internationally regarded as the most effective way to counter discriminatory approaches and attitudes towards students (UNESCO, 1994). International legislation and policy has evolved to challenge exclusionary practices and focus attention on equity and access to high-quality education for all, while respecting diversity (UNESCO, 2008). An ‘inclusive’ education system can only be created ‘if ordinary schools become more inclusive – in other words, if they become better at educating all children in their communities’ (UNESCO, 2009:8). Nonetheless, it is widely acknowledged that children with disability continue to experience different forms of exclusion, which vary depending upon their disability, domicile, and the culture or class to which they belong (UNICEF, 2013). Philosophical arguments and relevant research have progressed to the idea that children are of equal value; that the education of all children (including children labelled as disabled) should be of high quality; and therefore, education should be inclusive (Cologon, 2015).

As inclusion practices also require funding and resources, it is contested territory and often leads to emotional public debate. As discussed in Chapter One, in 2012 the island state of Tasmania had the highest prevalence of disability, with a quarter of that state’s population living with some form of disability (ABS, 2013). On its website, the Tasmanian Department of Education (DoE) states it is committed to ‘enabling all students to achieve quality outcomes through their participation in an inclusive, high quality education system that is responsive to their needs through appropriate access and participation in the Australian Curriculum’ (DoE, 2016). In 2015-16, the Tasmanian Liberal Government allocated \$71.9 million to DoE for students with disability. Schools can use these resources broadly and flexibly to meet the varied teaching and learning needs of students. A large component of the government funding is individually targeted funding for students with disability aligned to meeting the needs defined within their Individual Education Plans. This includes schools having access to extra funding ranging from \$5,000 to \$36,000 per student each year to support teaching and learning

programs to meet their learning needs. However, many families report that the Tasmanian Education Department's support is insufficient and claim Tasmanian schools could be breaching the Anti-Discrimination Act by failing to adequately support students with disabilities (Day, 2015). A survey of teachers the same year also found that ninety-one percent believe the current system was inadequate (Ryan, 2015). A year later, that had jumped to ninety-eight percent, with most teachers reporting they had increased numbers of disabled students (TDERL, 2016). The survey by the activist group Tasmanian Disability Education Reform Lobby (TDERL) also claimed parents were being forced to pull their children out of mainstream schools because of a decline in support for students with special needs.

In September 2015, the mother of an eleven-year old Tasmanian student with autism claimed her daughter had been left isolated and unsupervised in a classroom every day for two weeks. Footage captured on the child's mobile phone formed part of a national ABC news story. DoE cited privacy as the reason for not commenting on the report or responding to allegations of a breach of duty of care. According to the chair of TDERL, Kristen Desmond, that response was highly unsatisfactory:

Situations like this are completely unacceptable and if it doesn't point to the fact that we need active reform of the system right now, this minute, I don't know what does. It's excluding and in some ways, it's restraint. Exclusion is definitely not a strategy we should be using. (Baines, ABC, 2015)

Desmond expresses her frustration about apparent exclusion as part of a campaign she has been leading since 2012. Desmond is a highly articulate Tasmanian lawyer, former bank manager and Fair Work inspector. She is also the mother of three children on the autism spectrum. She established TDERL to support other parents who are trying to navigate an education system they feel does not properly support their children:

We advocate for structural change in the Tasmanian Educational system to ensure that students living with disability receive appropriate support. We believe that change comes one discussion at a time and it's time to fix a broken system. (TDERL, 2016)

Desmond's advocacy for structural change to 'fix a broken system' as claimed in the above quotation started with extensive online parent surveys each year on the level of support provided to their disabled children in Tasmanian schools. She has organised public rallies, staged media campaigns, and lobbied politicians for a review of the education system, claiming Tasmanian students should receive the same level of support as their mainland counterparts.

Yet the question of whether Tasmanian students with disability or additional learning needs can access and participate in education on the same basis as students without disability is answered according to whom you may ask. Funding and support are key areas of contest. Funding for educational needs for all children is seen as a complex, tangled web of promises between state and federal governments, as indicated by a cartoon entitled the 'The Education Regurgitation' by Kudelka in *The Australian*.

This cartoon has been removed for copyright or proprietary reasons.

Figure 3. (Kudelka, 2013)

Changes in funding promises, like those featured in the Kudelka cartoon, are further complicated by shifts in disability support programs. In 2012, Desmond conducted a parent satisfaction survey in state schools and its key findings, released the following year showed twenty-nine percent of families felt support was being provided to their children with disabilities; but forty-nine percent of families reported that their child received no additional support to assist their education. Desmond said it was time parents had more of a say in how state schools were treating their children.

We believe that parents and students views should be taken seriously and that all too often their views are undervalued. The Government needs to be held to account for the way in which the Tasmanian Education System is letting students living with disability down. (Desmond, 2013)

Part of the challenge highlighted by Desmond here is the low sense of priority and power felt by families of disabled children and a lack of acknowledgement of their concerns about systemic issues in the community or in local media:

...As with anything, it's really difficult unless you've got a hook to get the media interested in disability cause it's not a really sexy topic, unfortunately. (Desmond, interview, 19.9.13)

Desmond's campaigning and media engagement started with intensive lobbying of both tiers of government when DoE sacked 100 teacher aides for children with disability in 2011. A review of local media electronic and print media coverage about disability education in the two years before March 2013 heavily features Desmond as a spokeswoman, primarily on the issue of autism support.

Local media coverage on disability and education issues was predominantly presented through conflict or advocacy frames. The stories primarily focused on education funding cuts and the plight of parents of disabled children pitted against the government: 'Special students 'ignored'' (Glaezter, 2011); 'Parents seek better disability support; Tasmania's Education Minister has rejected calls for an independent state-based review of funding for disabled students' (ABC, 2012a); 'Call for minister to explain fund cut (Gallasch, 2011); 'Education apathy needs to change' (Gallasch, 2013a), and 'Kids left on the outer' (Richards, 2012a). Many of these stories featured language associated with power constructs with the disabled cast as powerless 'ignored' children pitted against the education 'system'; 'Disabled children miss out' (Martin, 2012a). Frequently, local media content like the online article 'Plea to invest more in autism support; A world-renowned psychologist visiting Tasmania wants governments to invest more in autistic children who can otherwise face a bleak adulthood' (Bryan, 2012)

used emotional language like ‘plea’ and ‘bleak’, highlighting powerlessness and hardship. Some local coverage of disability in education, particularly in commercial media, relied heavily on human interest themes as part of advocacy or conflict framing. They featured individual cases of disadvantage with case studies: ‘Learning the hard way, Tight budget leaves boy on the outer’ (Martin, 2012b), and ‘Budget cops blame for family’s plight’ (Black, 2012). Evidence of cohesion can be seen in this brief summary of headlines; the word ‘outer’ portraying the social exclusion for some disabled students, ‘plight’ suggestive of suffering. These can be viewed to elicit certain responses, notably sympathy and support for the affected families amongst the community.

6.2 The *Conversation* event

Establishing the *Conversation*

After major educational funding announcements in 2012 affecting students with disability, the 936 ABC Hobart *Drive* program team of Louise Saunders and Sarah Gillman decided the *Community Conversation* format would provide an appropriate forum to explore the complex, and often emotionally charged, issue of disability, schools, and funding at a local level. In interview, Saunders said the format of the *Community Conversation* format provided a useful way to focus on contested terrain of disability support and discuss it at length: ‘It can touch on issues that other people experience that they don’t necessarily believe anyone is talking about which can be something like the disability education’ (Saunders, interview, 16.09.13).

The content team sought feedback from the public via social media and online about what it should discuss in the program and why. Given no Twitter data is available and limits on online data, it is difficult to effectively ascertain the effectiveness of this pre-event promotion. Two weeks before the broadcast, marketing manager Gates used a database of organisations to email

parent and school groups, disability organisations and the station's Feedback Club's one thousand members about the special program. A week before the event, Saunders also posted an article on the 936 ABC Hobart's website, inviting engagement from the audience either via social media, talkback or through the online blog. No record was kept about the number of talkback calls they received on the issue, though both Saunders and Gillman remembered 'a few calls were received'. Five posts were made before the broadcast event and ten afterwards. These blog posts will be discussed in more detail later in this section. It is not known how many members of the community specifically pursued the talkback option, nor how Saunders adopted into her moderation.

When it came to sourcing guests, producer Gillman said the program team was determined to invite people who had direct and authentic experience of children with disabilities, or teaching children with disabilities, to participate and share their stories:

...Like integrating kids with special needs into classes, you know, you can have lots of theory or you can have advisors on it or you know, educational specialists but it's the sort of thing that you hear I guess, not just in Tasmania but around schools where parents will say, 'You know, I've pulled my child out to go to the Catholic system because he had five kids with special needs in his class and there were no teachers aid three days a week', and that type of stuff. So, we thought well that's interesting, you know, what about if you were on the other side and you wanted your child to be in the class. So, it's a chance to hear different sides like that. (Gillman, interview, 16.09.13)

Gillman's quotation highlights some of the anecdotal feedback the team had heard as community members themselves and through social media sharing, about the pressures and challenges of disability inclusion, stressing the program's interest to 'hear different sides' and explore the complexity of local challenges. In interview, Saunders said this meant substantial research of the field of disability education by her and Gillman: 'There's a lot of work put into

talking to people, what are the issues, what should we be talking about'. She said their investigations started a month before the broadcast debate, revealed teacher training as an important, if often under-represented or misunderstood, element of the debate about disability education. Therefore, Christopher Rayner from the School of Education at the University of Tasmania and lecturer in Inclusive Education was invited via email by Gillman to participate in the *Community Conversation*. A key aspect of his role, he said, is to develop and deliver a unit for pre-service teachers helps them work with students of all abilities and welcomed more public wider awareness of such training.

I didn't know the organisers personally but I suppose you know the issue was around teachers and students with disabilities and so it would make sense to have someone who's right in that role of preparing pre-service teachers to work with students with a disability to be involved. (Rayner, interview, 11.9.13)

It is appropriate for the public, said Rayner, to have more clarity about how teachers are trained to deal with disabilities as he had previously encountered a lack of understanding about pre-service training and was keen to highlight recent improvements. His reference in the above quotation to not knowing 'the organisers personally' is an interesting one, suggestive of how media access often emerges for individuals in smaller communities as a result of closer networks of personal and professional contacts.

Also approached by Gillman was Sallyann McShane, a mother with three girls who was interested to be involved 'to learn stuff for myself as well.' At the time of the *Community Conversation* her eldest was eleven years old, has Asperger syndrome (a form of autism), and Willow, the youngest was four years old, with a rare genetic disorder known as Turner's syndrome which has a variety of symptoms including heart defects. According to ABC Radio Rundown system, McShane had appeared on the 936 Breakfast program twice in the previous

six months with her daughters to speak about fundraising and was known by the *Drive* team as highly expressive and open about the challenges of parenting children with disabilities. As McShane said during the *Community Conversation*: ‘We don’t see that as something to be scared or afraid of or shameful of. For other people, it’s really difficult.’ McShane said she has learned to ‘speak up’ in the media about the challenges her family faces:

I’m a really good believer in sharing a story because it’s how I’ve learnt is by other parents sharing their stories. I find I learn more from other parents than health professionals or organisations. So, I think by sharing my story, it might then help, you know, someone else in a similar situation. (McShane, interview, 31.11.13)

This awareness of the educative power of storytelling demonstrates awareness of the importance of having her voice heard and power of personal narrative. Such preparedness to share her situation means she is frequently approached by local media outlets to comment on disability matters, but has felt misrepresented in print and television:

I find a lot of what the quotes are, it’s like, ‘No I didn’t say that, I’m not that articulate’ sometimes, or yeah, I just wouldn’t say that. So, I find with radio and stuff, it’s just, it’s there, you’ve said it. (McShane, interview, 31.11.13)

McShane’s preference for direct and live radio is informed by her personal disappointment and frustration at how she has been represented by other mediums.

To gain a better understanding of Education Department policy on disability, Gillman said she approached Lynne James via phone to invite her to take part in the broadcast. James is Director of Disability Programs with the Education Department and is responsible for policy and management of programs and structures that support state schools, learning services, children

with disabilities and families across Tasmania. She said in interview she was apprehensive about participating, mindful that as a public officer it was essential to convey accurate information and ‘You have also to be quite aware, that especially in this field, it’s quite an emotional sort of area to be talking about’ (James, interview, 3.9.13). James had also appeared previously on the 936 Breakfast program, speaking about literacy development for a child with Downs Syndrome and had engaged with the media in her presidential capacity of a national organisation, the Australian Association of Special Education. She stressed to Gillman that she wouldn’t be able to discuss individual cases, only the overarching policy and trends. James agreed to participate when Gillman reassured her that the forum would stay within those boundaries.

Also approached was Fiona Redgrove, a former school teacher and former chair of Tascare Society for Children, a voluntary organisation established in 1994 to assist children with disabilities. Although the physical activities of the Society have been considerably reduced over the years, the Society still supports families and disability support workers. Redgrove’s experience as a teacher and the fact that she teaches in the field of special education via Open Universities were key reasons for her inclusion, said Saunders. There is no evidence from the ABC Radio rundown system of her appearing on any other program.

Kristin Desmond from the Tasmanian Disability Education Reform Lobby group, the organisation she formed five months earlier, was approached to participate via a phone call from Saunders. Desmond welcomed this chance to represent Tasmanian families struggling with disability education issues:

...’cause what tends to happen is that the policy makers make the policy, the schools and Education Department implement the policy but no-one really checks to make sure the parents and the kids get a voice in all of that. It kind of gets missed sometimes. (Desmond, interview, 19.9.13)

Desmond's reference here to 'voice' in the above quote demonstrates high awareness of representation and identity, developed through her past few years of activism. Desmond was previously vice-president of Autism Tasmania before forming the new lobby group and had appeared on ABC Local Radio twice in that capacity.

Terry Polglase was the other guest invited via phone by Saunders after both she and Gillman agreed on the relevance of his insights as a representative of teachers in state schools and the challenges they face daily with disabled students. Polglase is the Tasmanian President of the Australian Education Union. As the key spokesman for the teachers' union, Polglase had been on ABC Radio eight times in the past year; commenting on issues ranging from funding cuts to class sizes. He was particularly keen to raise the broader issue of Gonski funding and how additional funding is required for special education.

The *Conversation* Logistics

Disability Education: A Community Conversation was held on the 19th of March 2013 and was hosted by Louise Saunders, the presenter of *Drive* 936 Hobart in southern Tasmania. It was promoted on-air, online and via social media by this line: 'In Tasmania, access to an appropriate curriculum is the right of all students. But does the system work for the children with a disability and their parents?' The program began with a 15-second voiceover from acting imaging producer, Heath Moore, over an audio bed of music: 'Continuing the *Community Conversation* with Louise Saunders, live and on location at the Baha'i Centre for Learning, a *Community Conversation* with Louise Saunders'. The forum was produced by 936 ABC Hobart *Drive* presenter Louise Saunders and content makers Sarah Gillman. Key ABC staff also

involved were content director, Lou Garnier; multiplatform editor, Carol Raabus; marketing manager, Kathy Gates and operations co-ordinator, John Lemm.

Consistent with the approach in the *Community Conversation* series to broadcast away from the ABC broadcast radio studios, this forum was held at the Baha'i Centre for Learning, near the ABC Broadcast Centre. This location was chosen for its proximity and the fact the religious centre was available to the production team for no cost. Importantly, the building had good disabled access and provided ample parking opportunities for the participants, including disabled parking. This event was open to the general public, and that invitation had been promoted on air and online. A small crowd of approximately 12 people gathered for the event, they appeared to be mainly associated with the guests and included McShane's three daughters. Lemm established access to a Telstra landline to ensure the broadcast could proceed without any interruption and it was tested the day before the event. The seating configuration of Saunders and the guests was deliberately designed between Lemm and the program team to ensure face-to-face interaction and create a more 'natural' setting, encouraging confidence from guests and a fluidity between the host broadcaster Saunders. She sat near the corner of a table, which supported the broadcast equipment and her clipboard. There was deliberately no barrier, like a table, between her and the *Conversation* guests. Enabling everyone to see each other was an effort to create a less confronting atmosphere for those not experienced or comfortable with media encounters. Unfortunately, the 'Madonna' headset microphones, purchased after the *Community Conversation* on heritage, were not available for use. Key panellists Redgrove and Desmond were seated in a semi-circle on plastic chairs facing Saunders with microphone stands in front of them with the remaining chair to the left of Saunders occupied by the interchange guests in this order; James, McShane, Polglase and Rayner. The seating configuration meant minimal disruption to the key panellists on air as the interchange guests took their position for the broadcast. As with other *Community*

Conversations, the program started at 16.05pm after the ABC news headlines and was simultaneously broadcast live on analogue on 936 ABC Hobart and via digital platforms, enabling people to also listen online.

Discourse features of the *Conversation*

Saunders introduced the conversation by acknowledging there had been considerable engagement already with the topic online, detailing how listeners could engage further via social media and saying she had been ‘really looking forward’ to the event, indicative of a strong personal interest in the topic. She stressed the breadth of the topic, and that the genre of this *Community Conversation* would explore a variety, but not all, aspects within it. Through a series of questions, Saunders mapped the structure of the program and foreshadowed some of the perspectives that would be shared in the hour of special broadcast:

But, what are the problems, what are the issues, what are the issues that are faced by parents, by students themselves, by those that give the education and provide the education and also those that work in the system behind it. (Saunders, *CC*, 20.3.13)

While Saunders here canvases key questions and challenges in disability education, she also introduces a major theme guiding the discussion, that of powerful others: ‘the system’, the dominant institutional power of prevailing political ideology. Indeed, the word ‘system’ is the most frequently used keyword in *Community Conversation – Disability Education*, appearing 38 times and is used by each of the participants to advance their particular frames, which will be explored in more detail later in this section. The other key words to emerge in the broadcast, from a variety of participants were ‘funding’ (37 times), and ‘support’ (27 times), indicative of

the key areas of contest within this issue. These were dominant themes throughout the discussion.

At the outset, one of the co-hosts, Redgrove asserted her professional credibility to enhance her persuasive strategy and attempted to set the agenda:

...It was very interesting for me to jump ship from the Education Department and to step on the side of advocating on behalf of families with children with disabilities and I guess I am very aware of how the Education Department looked from the parents' perspective. (Redgrove, CC, 19.3.13)

Inferring possession of insider DoE knowledge promotes Redgrove's authority to challenge the Education Department's approach to inclusion:

...I think it's been shown that for a lot of children, forcing them into the same classroom is not actually the environment in which they can get the best education. So, we've got to really think about what it is that we're trying to do for our children, simply make them all the same and put them into the same environment, or provide them all with the very best educational outcomes that we can and how that can be done. (Redgrove, CC, 19.3.13)

Redgrove is directly challenging the current inclusion policy, asserting truth modality about the impacts of 'forcing them into the same classroom' and raising doubt about the level of special education expertise with the school system:

I think that sort of teachers that have got that more intensive knowledge about how to work with some of these children is what's missing perhaps. And I know there are support staff out there but I don't know that our education of our staff here in Tasmania is giving them the same sort of skills and knowledge that perhaps we once had. (Redgrove, CC, 19.3.13)

This criticism about the standard of teaching and support staff is interestingly timed. It was final comment before Saunders concludes the broadcast and hence is not directly challenged at this point. Rayner earlier raises obligation modality of improving training standards:

I mean we need to continually evaluate our progress and our environments in which we work are continually going to change. We need to reflect on what we're doing and always do it better. (Rayner, *CC*, 19.3.13)

Rayner's acknowledgement that more can be done is supported by DoE's Lynne James, shifting potential frames of conflict established by Redgrove to more civic framing. Redgrove's doubts about the implementation about inclusion are directly acknowledged by James:

...Because if we build the capacity of our teachers to deal with, as I agree with, you know, Fiona, often highly complex circumstances in classrooms, then that is supported through professional learning. (James, *CC*, 19.3.13)

The above quotation from the Education Department's representative recognises the complexity of the challenges, acknowledging more needs to be done to improve the response of schools. This use of obligation modality defuses efforts at conflict framing by Redgrove and others, though James avoids casting aspersions on their arguments. Using Redgrove's first name also shifts the order of discourse. Another direct criticism of the Department from Desmond: 'When it comes to quality learning for students with disabilities, isn't measured' is handled in a similar way by James:

...We've got a curriculum to map the learning goals for students against that will also give us then the opportunity to report the learning outcomes and the assessment for those students' gains that Kristen would like to see. (James, *CC*, 19.3.13)

This is another attempt by James to demonstrate that Education Department is striving to deliver what parents like Desmond want. Again, James' use of Desmond's christian name personalises the response, evoking a sense of sympathy and support to the parent's plight, overcoming ways individuals are placed, or interpellated, into certain subject positions by ideology via superstructural institutions like the education system. It counters efforts by others to advance their framing that the 'system' is an unapproachable, unresponsive and potentially, uncaring entity.

Indeed, human impact is a powerful theme in this discussion, deepened by personal storytelling from McShane and Desmond, who establishes her family's struggle of 'trying to navigate through the school system' and 'learn our way through the system' to build understanding of her motivation to be an activist for Tasmanian children with disabilities:

...It became more and more obvious to me that it wasn't just kids with Autism that were struggling through the system and parents tended to feel very alone and like, you were fighting the system on your own, when the reality is you're not at all. (Desmond, *CC*, 19.3.13)

Desmond's comments are presented through conflict framing with the words 'struggling', 'fighting' and 'alone'. It makes reference to the oppositional grouping of struggling parents versus the Education Department: 'the system'. This use of the term 'system' advances advocacy framing and is reinforced by the link to difficult personal experiences. Desmond does not directly cast aspersions on James but infers unfair power is being held by 'the system', which is why she formed the new lobby group for parents: 'So it's not just that difficult for

them to get their views across and try and get their children adequately supported' (Desmond, CC, 19.3.13). This quotation both highlights the basic right to be heard and a common ambition for parents to seek the best for their children, something that would resonate with a majority of the listening audience. Both are reasonable expectations in Tasmanian society but the inference here is that they were being denied to certain families. This is a powerful example of cohesion aimed at eliciting supportive, maybe sympathetic, response from the listening audience. McShane's advocacy for more support is also reinforced by emotional statements like this one:

I have to hope my child gets on the severe disability register, no parent wants to hope that for their child but it's the only way she's going to get funding next year. So, it's, you shouldn't have to hope for that. (McShane, CC, 19.3.13)

McShane at this point exhibits a sense of powerlessness and desperation, likely to elicit a supportive response from participants and the audience. Saunders shifts the discussion with the question 'What is it we expect for our children with disabilities in Tasmania's education system?' The use of the possessive pronoun 'our' is of note as it suggests collective social ownership; indicative of civic framing, shared responsibility and the contribution to social wellbeing. Further evidence emerges of this civic framing emerges through Saunders' encouragement of collaboration amongst parties, as demonstrated by respectful, open questions like 'There's no template, is there, to disability?' and tactfully exploring whether McShane had experienced discrimination towards her children 'Is it something that you're sensitive to, that you're aware of and you have concerns about?' The use of the pronoun 'we' by Desmond is interesting, as it is used ambiguously to reach beyond the membership of her group:

What we need to do though is make sure that inclusion works for the kids that are part of that system, and I think that's the bit that we miss a little bit. We put in

policies in place that we think are going to work, but we don't always check back with parents and students to make sure it's actually working for them. (Desmond, *CC*, 19.3.13)

While this quote starts in a more civic frame, suggestive of a community approach, it shifts to her truth modality about departmental policies and their lack of success and engagement with clients, advancing Desmond's advocacy frame for better support and funding. The pronoun 'we' is again also used by Polglase, however for the purpose of linking to advocacy of his membership group, teachers.

...We need to look after every child no matter who they are as they walk through a school door, whether they have, whether they're on a register or not. And there are many students who aren't, who create far more issues for schools and teachers and other parents than those who are on the register. We do come down to money. (Polglase, *CC*, 19.3.13)

Polglase identifies that extra funding and resources are at the heart of tensions about autonomy and control. As a former teacher, this truth modality loans credibility to his persuasive strategy for more support:

...You've got to understand, when a principal is meeting with parents, they're caught between a rock and a hard place about trying to offer more, not only for the parent and the child, but the teacher and the teacher assistant. (Polglase, *CC*, 19.3.13)

This metaphor reinforces the complexity schools experience with disability support. While acknowledging that importance of the teacher-principal relationship and emphasising how it can work so well, Desmond then carefully shifts the order of discourse:

If the senior staff in the school aren't supportive of that teacher then you can run into, you can run into issues. A lot of it is about great relationships but part of our survey last year found that parents had and felt that schools were listening to them but their hands were tied. (Desmond, CC, 19.3.13)

Desmond's suggestion that senior department staff are often obstructive to providing support is reinforced by her reference to data reinforcing her truth modality and the use of the figurative metaphor about powerlessness. It enables her to change the order of discourse with truth modality about inconsistency and a lack of transparency from schools but is rejected by obligation modality about resourcing from Polglase:

...To overcome the problems that we actually have in our schools, we need people on the ground, we need seniors, we need people who can communicate with parents, we need training, and it's that sort of money which will simply say, 'we're going to get stuck into inclusion and we're going to resolve the problems to everybody's satisfaction'. (Polglase, CC, 19.3.13)

In highlighting these four priorities for disability education in Tasmania, Polglase reinforces his advocacy framing more government funding. Concluding the broadcast, Saunders reinforced that the intent of the *Community Conversation* was to not to provide a fix, rather enable an opportunity for local concerns about disability education to be raised in detail and for its complexity to be shared with the listening audience:

... We had no intention of being able to answer every question, solve every problem, but I think we might perhaps be able to agree that funding is always going to be an issue, the work of teachers, the training of teachers, and the application of teachers is something to be both recognised and also developed in the future and that there can be some wonderful programs in schools and there'll always be issues and more questions to answer and to ask. (Saunders, CC, 19.3.13)

Saunders' concluding remarks summarises that key points of consensus did emerged through the event, however tensions and conflict about disability support remain.

The *Conversation* online

Community Conversation: Disability in Education was supported by posts on Twitter, Facebook and online at the ABC station website in addition to the preview online and database promotion, discussed earlier, enabling families to raise key concerns:

Do they not deserve an education the same as everyone else and why do I have to continually fight against schools who's only response is "We don't have the funding?" (Posted by: Sharon O'Beirne, 12.03.13)

As a parent, it is frustrating to know that the Education Department has an inclusion policy for kids like mine but the schools themselves lack proper funding to really implement it! (Posted by: Tina Williamson, 13.03.13)

Saunders said in interview the online forum gave people a voice: 'People feel they really got, certainly get something off their chest'. Desmond said later in interview that social media is central to the activist network as families use it to break down isolation and become more engaged with information and advocacy. A request for the audio of the conversation to be posted online was amongst the entries and Saunders and team responded and delivered in the affirmative.

During the broadcast event itself, photos of the broadcast and key points were shared on Facebook and Twitter during and post the event. As this was one of the first forays of 936 ABC

Hobart into targeted online audience engagement and hence, figures of engagement were relatively low and data capture is limited. Two of the Facebook posts from the 936 ABC Hobart page that could be retrieved were from individuals criticising inclusion policies: ‘Mainstream is not suitable for all’ and ‘It doesn’t work with kids with intellectual disabilities, particularly in the core subjects’.

There is no data available from Twitter prior to October 2013. After the event, a MP3 of audio of the conversation was also uploaded on the twentieth of March to the station’s web page with links to a few relevant organisations: The Gonski Review, Students with Disabilities and Department of Education websites. According to the analytic tool *Webtrends*, used by ABC Online, there was a total reach of 3004 to this recording on abc.net.au/Hobart in the first week after its broadcast. This post-event sharing is aligned with the ABC’s strategy to serve the audience on whatever platform it chooses to access content.

6.2.1 Participant reflection and impact

Conversation participants

Of all the non-ABC participants, Desmond had the greatest level of media experience and is acutely aware the power of personal narratives in advancing her agenda:

Once you get the general community going, ‘hold on that’s not fair, why aren’t we doing something about it’, you’re more likely to get the shift that you need. (Desmond, interview, 19.9.13)

While advancing her strategic agenda, Desmond said the structure and conduct of this ABC radio forum allowed a different approach to disability education issues, as other local media had previously focused on poor treatment of individuals, not exposing a wider to consider the ongoing difficulties of raising disabled children or school inclusion. Common perceptions, she said in interview, were challenged and importantly explained in the event:

...It's not often these days you get an hour of someone talking about one particular topic let alone a disability topic like this. And people might have thought, 'Well they're just going to complain cause there's not enough money in it', and in fact the discussion of it panned out really well, it wasn't about how much money there was in it, it was about, 'How is our inclusion system working, is it working properly, is it benefiting students, what innovations, how much teacher training is there?' so there were lots of other things that actually could have had flow on benefits. (Desmond, interview, 19.9.13)

She stresses that having the opportunity to explore the complexity of disability education at the local level was essential: 'If you put this in any other context but a local one, the message actually would be lost.' However, disability advocacy it is not a single message, and power struggles exist the local disability community. Indeed, the other parent of children with disability involved, Sally McShane said in interview those advocating for better autism support like Desmond tend to get more media attention.

SM: I find in Tasmania the Autism voice is the loudest.

JN: Why's that?

SM: Why, I don't know, I really don't. (McShane, interview, 31.11.13)

These comments are indicative of the existence of a power paradigm within the disability support lobby movement in Tasmania, possibly linked to the lobby effectiveness of high-profile

advocates like Desmond. McShane said that a wider range of disabilities deserve more representation but ‘Sometimes you don’t have it in you to fight the big battles’:

I think it’s really important because you can have experts talking about things forever but unless you’re living it, you really have no idea what it’s like on a day to day basis and I think these people who are making decisions for us and for our kids, I think they need to hear the, you know, average Joe so to speak, opinion in it. (McShane, interview, 31.11.13)

In interview, McShane said she had felt misrepresented and uncomfortable in a past media engagement about her family, however found the ABC team’s approach and behaviour gave her confidence she would be listened to.

You know, you don’t just go, ‘Right, inclusion, let’s just say how it’s not working and bag out the government’. You get people from all different sectors and have a discussion about it. There’s a big difference I think to having a discussion as to having, just putting a prepared one-sided story across. (McShane, interview, 31.11.13)

McShane highlights the importance of hearing a variety of perspectives in public discourse, enabled through civic framing adopted by Saunders and others. This was also mentioned by Rayner in interview who had previously experienced a lack of public understanding of what happens at the pre-service teacher level. He praised the team’s efforts at sourcing a diversity of participants: ‘I think there were deliberate and obvious efforts to have that range of perspectives and I think that was done thoughtfully’. In terms of representation and recognition, however, James was disappointed that the *Community Conversation* lacked the voice of a student:

So, I thought that was a key voice that I was, you know, a bit worried wasn't there because we talk about people but the people that we're actually here to support should have been front and centre. And I know a lot of them, their parents speak for them but that's changing too for, even with students with quite complex needs. There are opportunities for them to have their own voice. (James, interview, 3.9.13)

This emphasises the importance of voice, featuring the obligation modality of seeking better engagement with disabled students. In interview, James said it is a key DoE focus with student forums and networking opportunities like camps for specific disabilities. James' preparedness to be part of the *Community Conversation* on behalf of the department impressed McShane:

...It was great because you can see that they really do care, they're genuine people. When you meet them in person or hear them talking in person, given they're being genuine. (McShane, interview, 31.11.13)

This comment by McShane indicates that encountering someone from 'the system' is a rare event, suggestive of a power divide between the department and families. As a senior public servant in a sensitive policy arena, James said she overcame her initial reluctance to participate in the public forum by the conduct of producer Gillman 'She was very reassuring' and the trust she had in the local ABC service: 'I don't see, like, the ABC's like some of the other talk shows that you hear about on the mainland'. For Rayner, the radio team's effort to broadcast away from the studios at the Baha'i Centre made the experience far less intimidating.

CR: It was set up in a room that didn't look like a recording studio but was you know obviously did the job but you know there was opportunity to be sitting with others...It was a nice atmosphere really.

JN: What effect do you think that nice atmosphere had in terms of the interaction between participants on air?

CR: I think it meant that we didn't feel like competitors. I think we've, I don't think that there was a person there that would, were, I think we were all there for the same reasons, that we all wanted to see the best outcomes for teachers and at the end of the day, for students with disabilities. So, I don't think anyone would disagree with that. So, in a sense, it's not a topic where there was going to be polarisation. (Rayner, interview, 11.9.13)

This prompts questions about what level of self-censorship was at work in the event as clearly there was recognition of the existence of conflict and disagreement about resourcing. Desmond said she felt awkward raising criticism of teachers:

...Because they're trying their best to do what they can within the system they've got so when you talk about change in the system, most people will talk about that if there's an answer. And in this particular one there isn't necessarily an answer. It's about having the conversation and understanding and moving where it needs to move. (Desmond, interview, 19.9.13)

This reflection highlights how Saunders' civic framing approach assisted participants. Despite disagreeing with some of Desmond's arguments during the event, Polglase said the radio forum did provide a constructive forum for a diversity of views to be explored:

Well that's democracy and if you don't have that, what do you have. So, it's fundamental. Without it we'd be so much, so much the poorer. We would simply be accepting of whoever has the power and the decisions that they make. (Polglase, interview, 30.9.13)

Polglase highlights democratic tensions which can arise when voice is suppressed or not listened to. Explaining complex policy issues with affected parties, and increasing public knowledge, is seen by James to be important:

...There's no point in you know, shying away from these sorts of discussions because even if somebody only picked up out of that that you know, all of our students have rights to be able to be educated alongside their peers, that's a great point. So, it's really I think great to have those discussions...I think those community forums are a good way to do that across a range of different topics, so, whether it's health or education or whatever it might be, it allows a range of different perspectives to be heard. (James, interview, 3.9.13)

Confronting local issues through different perspectives, as outlined in this quote from James is, of course, available through other forums other than the format used by the ABC particularly with the range of social media outlets on offer. However, McShane emphasises communication is very different when it is face-to-face and moderated in good faith, rather than engaging with what she described as debate with 'keyboard warriors' on social media.

...You've picked a cross section of the community, it's much more balanced discussion than on social media, where you've just got, normally people who have banded together for the same reason, talking about the same thing. Yeah, so it makes it really one sided I think a lot of the time. (McShane, interview, 31.11.13)

Conversation content makers

The concentration of like-minded discussion and polarisation emerging on social media, said Garnier, is creating social isolation, intensifying the importance of the ABC:

I think we're getting more and more, as people, isolated and I think this is why it's important that an organisation like the ABC can actually bring people in to talk. If we don't do it, what's going to happen? Meeting at Town Hall becomes political, you know, meeting at the school, becomes political. Let's broaden it out, do you see what I mean? I think social media is making us more isolated and I think it's really, really important we go to a broader platform. Hence, we all need to talk. (Garnier, interview, 15.01.14)

This commitment to talk, listening and interpersonal connection reinforces reflections shared earlier by Rayner and McShane. With the skill and good faith of Saunders' facilitation, said Gillman, this type of journalism-as-conversation can be inclusive yet wide ranging:

Louise goes very much into it with an idea that, 'I'm here trying to find out information for myself', you know, like, and it goes back to that idea I suppose in journalism that if you're interested in people, that will come through. And so she doesn't go in with any preconceived ideas. So, she wants to genuinely hear, so I guess as a result of that, she almost naturally, without thinking, if someone is becoming a bit dominant, pulls them back in order to bring someone else back into the conversation. The other thing is she does a lot of reading of stuff beforehand. (Gillman, interview, 16.09.13)

This quotation highlights another important journalistic quality, that of curiosity. The challenge for a journalist to equip themselves with good research to mediate an event with authority and fair handedness is another interesting observation, given the time pressures journalists now face as they work across platforms, as discussed in Chapter Three. In interview, multiplatform reporter Raabus was pleased the *Drive* program team chose this topic for a *Community Conversation*, as she said disability is often regarded as an awkward topic by the media, leading to those with disabilities lacking recognition.

I think you know, disability in general is something people don't want to talk about or think about and those you know, those actually living with it feel generally very cut off and isolated and just yeah, that they don't have power or any place in society often. (Raabus, interview, 14.01.14)

This raises some key questions about the impact of a lack of recognition. Like James, Raabus was disappointed no disabled student got the opportunity to participate:

It would have been nice to actually hear from people that had disabilities. There were some parents but yeah, and I know that that's really difficult to do, to find someone who's willing to talk about that and can and you know, and obviously there are issues if they're children and all that sort of stuff as well but really getting a personal you know, we were talking about what education is like for, or access to it is, for people with disabilities but we didn't talk to anyone with an actual disability. (Raabus, interview, 14.01.14)

This is complex territory for media professionals to navigate. Again, it highlights the need for adequate time and resources from ABC Radio to identify, support potential participants and gain their trust. Part of establishing such community links and relationships also requires maintenance of contact. There is also the question of how content makers could or should support people with participation. While media training per se is not allowed, perhaps there needs to be mechanisms of familiarising people with basic media practices to empower them to participate. It is not known whether the team had tried to involve a disabled student but in interview, content makers did report the load of adding curation of the event onto their everyday program workloads had already been significant. In interview, Gillman said she and Saunders are particularly cognisant of matters of voice and recognition, particularly informed by working in smaller media markets during their careers.

I think you feel very connected to the community there and you see straight away the impact the media has and why, not only different voices as a representation, but if you're really going to canvas a story or an issue, you really have to go beyond one or two people cause there might be lots of different views and so, there's that side of the story... We have to say to people, 'Don't give us who you think we would want, who do you think would be good', but then, just by the nature of the medium,

you also need to have people who can talk. So that's a downside. (Gillman, interview, 16.09.13)

The ability for participants to perform on radio is identified here as another potential barrier to voice and access. However, Gillman stresses that media settings can help overcome people's fear and apprehension. The configuration of the *Conversation* setting meant Saunders did not have to thrust a microphone at participants, as that would make it more like an interview where people were hesitant and wait their turn to speak 'whereas I've noticed in the last ones we've had, people talk more to each other. So, it becomes more of a conversation.' Gates, who observed this broadcast, said the setting relaxed participants:

...It was pretty free flowing. I mean that's the other thing that's interesting, these are conversations. They're not interviews as such. So, and they bring voices in and out, different voices in and out. So that seemed to be quite good and also because I think they go for an hour, that's probably long enough time. But it seemed very relaxed so that was good. (Gates, interview, 14.01.14)

This suggests the good faith practices of the presenter, prepared to listen and fairly invite a variety of voices 'in and out'. Allowing sufficient time for perspectives to be shared in the radio forum is another key point made here by Gates, supported by Saunders:

...When they start, they say what you're raising is important, doing the right thing, I'm talking not just to you but to the people who are listening who might be in similar experiences, if people feel relaxed enough to share personal stories and details that they might not in another format, then I think we've achieved something there as well. And if people pick up on things that are being said through the conversation and we can expand on them or come back to them or refer to them, then I think that works then as a conversation rather than as three or four separate interviews. (Saunders, interview, 16.09.13)

While this observation suggests the power of personal narrative in storytelling and framing, it also points to how social cohesion can develop collaborative discourse. It contributes to citizenship, said the ABC's Mark Scott:

I think there are numbers of factors that come in that strengthen citizenship. One is that sense that the voices of people, people feel that they can speak and will be heard. And I think that's a powerful thing, that it is, you know, that our elected officials are merely representatives of all these other voices so let's go direct to all these other voices. But in hearing them, I hope we have deeper understanding really of what, of what motivates people, what drives people, what they're frightened of. (Scott, interview, 24.5.13)

Scott reinforces the importance of listening and access as integral to the evolving role of the ABC. At the local level, Saunders sees this type of broadcast is an example of how public service media serves its community:

I think it reinforces firstly that the ABC is public radio and is publically accessible and that anyone who has an issue or a concern is fodder for what we do I guess. I mean, what we're doing is not for an elite or an educated level, but anyone who's got a story to tell that touches upon a subject we raise, is liable or is possibly able to be part of what we do. (Saunders, interview, 16.09.13)

Aftermath

The day after the *Community Conversation*, Tasmanian Education Minister Nick McKim was interviewed by Saunders on 936 *Drive* about some of the concerns raised by participants during the *Community Conversation*, specifically the funding allocation being made to schools not individual cases. While there were no announcements, the Minister 'was keen to follow up' on matters raised. In terms of advancing political change, a significant connection and alliance

emerged from the *Community Conversation*. Polglase said it was the first time he had met Desmond and was now working with her to incorporate that group's concerns into lobbying by AEU's and Principals Association:

And we're informing the Minister, so he's getting, without us connecting in that way, which was generated through the ABC show, the Minister could be making decisions on 10 million dollars' worth of money next week without being informed and not having a clue about the on the ground implications of his decisions. (Polglase, interview, 30.9.13)

This collaboration between the union and leading advocacy group indicates how face-to-face connections in non-conflict discourse enabled new connections that potentially could challenge power, 'the system', increasing scrutiny on its funding and support. Desmond said the broadcast event provided a valuable, educational resource to share with families, in Tasmania and interstate. Dozens of families told Desmond they were grateful for having their experiences represented on the radio and being able to access and share it online:

... 'cause for a long time, especially in disability, most people spend ninety-nine percent of their time just getting through the day, trying to deal with their child and with their issues. So, knowing that that is out there and people could listen to it, and that was the feedback we got cause it was, 'somebody understands where we're coming from', because they could listen to it, they get it, at least they're talking about it. (Desmond, interview, 19.9.13)

The fact that the event was available on-demand later, Desmond said, not only engaged people on their own terms but also created a digital asset for building public knowledge. This was reinforced by McShane:

It's priceless because a lot of people work, they're not available at that time to listen to it, they don't know it was happening so I think plenty of people involved go, 'hey look we did this today',

you know, and I shared it through some of, you know, those networks, like the Mytime group that I'm part of which is all parents of children with special needs. Yeah, and then they get a chance to have a listen too. (McShane, interview, 31.11.13).

Saunders said the anecdotal feedback she received was mostly from people touched by the personal stories and shared case studies of disability.

If you start humanising the story and sharing the experiences then it can become I guess a little, more understanding of a community that you might not necessarily be part of. So, I think that has a benefit. (Saunders, interview, 16.09.13)

Saunders' refers to the power of personal story telling and what it can play in social cohesion. ABC management received two emails praising the tone and depth of the discussion. The *Drive* program team also reported a limited amount of feedback via talkback and as discussed earlier, online. Saunders said most of the subsequent engagement was commentary about the pros and cons of inclusion as canvassed in the broadcast:

...It wasn't a resolution but we don't try to be that, we try to be an opening up with the discussion, and to that extent I think people agree that's what we did...It's their ABC, they've got access to their ABC, for their issues for an hour. And I think that was really important to them. (Saunders, interview, 16.09.13)

Saunders here highlights the issue of access and diversity on public broadcasting radio. Raabus said she is aware the online recording has been shared amongst disability groups but noted that the method of delivery was not as inclusive as it should have been, as the husband of a deaf woman rang to see if a braille version was available for his wife, which it was not. Due to a technical problem, an online story was not generated after the event. Despite this, Desmond

described it as valuable in highlighting to the broader community the complexity of challenges faced by all involved with disability education.

KD: ...There's no silver bullet but we're all kind of the same opinion that as it works now, it's not really working as well as it should do. And it started to throw up reasons why we should be talking about, and why we need to make things better.

JN: What sort of role do you think this sort of like grass roots discussion has in terms of policy influence, political impact, you know, what's its value?

KD: Look I think there's a value in it if you can start having the conversation. Our group's ethic is, 'change happens through conversation', it doesn't matter how small the conversation is but if you can start to get the greater community on side and understanding what you want to achieve then political change and policy change can happen cause they tend to pay attention to what's happening in the community. (Desmond, interview, 19.9.13)

In July 2013, three months after *Disability Education: A Community Conversation* the Tasmanian and Australian Governments signed Better Schools Tasmania, aimed to improve the quality and equity of the education system. Better Schools Tasmania aspires to reach the level of public funding for schools that will minimise educational disadvantage and facilitate a high-quality education for every student in every school in Tasmania. Enrolment at one of eight special schools will be considered when it is requested by a parent and when the child has a significant, identifiable disability which includes a moderate to profound intellectual disability. However, two years later, the Commissioner for Children Mark Morrissey said Tasmanian schools still need to improve their delivery of disability education. In a submission to a Senate inquiry, Morrissey said many improvements in disability education could be made by simply listening to the views of parents and children (Bird, 2015).

6.3 Discussion

This *Community Conversation* helped contextualise disability education in Southern Tasmania and make visible various factors shaping those developments. Necessary to the event's formation and engagement of parties was consensus (later confirmed in interviews with participants afterwards), that this is a complex and emotionally charged part of community life and there is no easy, one size fits-all solution (Bray, 2011). However, tensions were fuelled by the battle for control for resources and funding, driven by ideological differences. Power relations are therefore central to analysis.

The empirical data provides important insights into three of my research questions. Firstly, the focus of this section will be on why it matters that citizens can be involved in local radio conversations. Later, the discussion will assess what the data reveals about the professional practices that, contestably, improve public debate and political conversation and the ways public broadcasting radio can help improve democracy.

In interview, participants said the forum had been a different to other local media encounters as it provided an opportunity to better explain their positions and agenda to the audience and other participants in a less threatening environment. This expanded participation is aligned with the wider role between citizens and the media role envisaged by some scholars (Bohman, 2000; Couldry et al., 2007) to support democratic deepening (Cottle, 2002). Research by Saunders and Gillman into the topic of disability, through reading government and lobbyist reports, also identified highly relevant matters not previously raised in the data of previous media discourse. This helped bridge the expert-public gap (Charity, 1995; Livingstone and Lunt, 1994), and contributed deepening public knowledge, potentially changing civic and political outcomes (Dahlgren, 2009; McNair, 2012; Mastin, 2000; Campbell, 1999). While ABC staff expressed in interview their intention to include otherwise marginalised voices, seen as necessary for

recognition (Honneth, 2007), this effort was restricted for a number of practical reasons which will be discussed later in this section.

Discourse features of this event revealed a contest of power between powerful others, the dominant institutional power interpellated as ‘the system’, often using human impact themes reinforced by emotional personal story telling (Kuhne and Schemer, 2013; Kunelius and Renwall, 2010; Nabi, 2007). An example of this was when McShane expressed hopes for her child to be officially classified on the register, evoking a sense of powerlessness and desperation likely to elicit a supportive response from participants and the audience. Indeed, personal storytelling was frequently used as a strategic communication device. Indeed, Desmond said in interview had been effective in previous media interaction to advance of the TDERL advocacy and promote political change. The ‘interpellated’ system was frequently referred to by participants as a blockage or restriction – to their families, students, union members and, as argued by Desmond and Polglase, limiting transparency with the wider community.

It was challenged by a number of participants in a variety of ways like personal story telling (Desmond, McShane), the assertion of professional credibility (Redgrove, Polglase) and the shifting of framing between participants, particular efforts from Desmond and Polglase to move from civic framing established by Saunders, Rayner or James. While the theme of powerful others, the ‘system’, was active throughout, it was tempered by the respectful, direct and personally-focused discourse from civic official James. At some points, she was also prepared to sponsor some of the advocacy framing through acknowledging of hardship, shifting the agenda away from conflict into more civic terms.

To a limited degree, perspectives differing from the prevailing point of view were heard, supportive of the scholarship suggesting political conversation does not have to have specific

purpose or agenda (Kim et al., 2007). While this *Community Conversation* helped some challenge political control of the disability issue (Chen, 2004), analysis of discourse features shows it was also undermined by a number of factors. Consistent with Habermas' (1992) definition of ethical communication, participants were cautious about casting aspersions on each other's arguments, instead opting for the strategies listed above. This lack of conflict, or degrees of passive consensus, may have undermined the effectiveness of the discourse to move beyond the event enabling participation through the facilitation of rational deliberation; creating and communicating moral principles and expressing personal and group affects and needs (Considine, 1994).

A key silence of the conversation was the intense power struggle over resources, namely funding allocation to schools and students. While there were no direct challenges to matters raised, instead contested power emerged through framing and in figurative terms like 'hands tied' or 'rock and a hard place'. The dominant themes of powerful others and human interest, were both strategically used as part of conflict and advocacy framing that emerged, like the oppositional grouping of parents 'struggling'. These frames were consistent with conflict framing used in previous local media coverage and had proven effective in advancing advocacy campaigns.

Consensus did emerge on two fronts: that there is no 'silver bullet' solution and that the discussion had been valuable in terms of improving public awareness of disability challenges in schools and the complexity of pressures it poses to public policy and workplace management practice. However, individuals did not substantially go beyond self-interest to orient oneself to a common good (Bohman, 1998).

The lack of conflict or debate on the critical matter of funding beyond acknowledgement of the problem raises questions about social pressures to conform in public debate, contrary to the

democratic objective to produce decisions that are reflective of the needs and concerns of all (Vasilev, 2015). Regardless this journalism-as-conversation event (Carey, 1995) can be regarded as an ‘action opportunity’ (Couldry et al., 2007), in that participants approached civil society as both including the space of media and allowed for a broader range of ‘communities of practice’, including with the disability community.

This is supported by the evidence of online engagement which was the most of any *Community Conversation* reviewed in this thesis. This is indicative of several factors. There are strong online networks of families with disabilities involved in support and activist groups, some of whom have been empowered by citizen journalism on the internet (Dueze et al., 2007; McChesney and Picard, 2011). They are politically active and powerful (Benkler, 2006) and it is an example of how culture interacts with politics as ‘new’ media interact with mainstream news (Hartley and Green, 2006). Digital media is pivotal to Desmond’s activism strategies, with her advocacy framing during the broadcast strengthened by references to data obtained from online parent surveys. Such data helps provide a more authoritative context for challenging dominant political and media discourse world, making her a more influential citizen and advocate (Livingstone, 2004).

The fact that the blog was being moderated by the ABC can also be seen as indicating that the organisation was ‘listening’ and behaving in good faith (Endelman, 2001; Mansbridge, 2012). As in Chapter Five, a preparedness to listen by Saunders and other *Conversation* guests was noted by participants and content makers to be of vital importance (Gadamer, 1989; Couldry, 2010; Dreher, 2012). There was evidence the families had been ‘listened to’ (Gadamer, 1989; Couldry, 2010; Dreher, 2012). The Minister responded the following day on-air to matters raised in the forum. Content makers said feedback from a variety of families was also enabled and captured on the ABC’s website and social media accounts, though other than the blog posts, there is no record of this. Reaction to Saunders’s facilitation of the event supports

research that cordial relationships (Eveland et al., 2011), good faith (Mansbridge, 2012), and recognition (Honneth, 1995; Fraser, 2000) can lead to greater confidence in democratic approaches to governance as well as reduced ideological polarisation, highlighting more insights into the democracy-enabling roles of media. Ideological alignment from content makers to the public broadcaster's values of social inclusion (Scannell, 1997), and providing access to a diversity was expressed frequently in interview, as Garnier puts it, 'ABC can actually bring people in to talk' and Gillman's remark about 'hear[ing] different sides' consistent with ABC organisational values (ABC 2017b).

The inclusion of Redgrove, McShane and Desmond gave a prominent voice to community activists, in contrast to some previous research (Kannis, 1991; O'Neill and O'Connor, 2008). Two of these were already established connections for the program team and were adept media performers, comfortable to share their personal experiences of the challenge of disability. However, source selection only partly managed to ensure (Couldry, 2009, 2010) that marginalised groups are heard as the same extent as dominant groups. The omission of a disabled student on the panel was noted by James and Raabus to be significant. It is not clear why this is the case. Interview data indicates it may have been linked to the expectations of how they might perform in the media environment, which was clearly a significant factor in the selection of some of the other participants. The mothers of disabled children that were represented had substantial media experience and were personally empowered with confidence to speak up, as expressed by McShane: 'We don't see that as something to be scared, or afraid of, or shameful of. For other people, it's really difficult.'. This raises important questions about the limits imposed on voice.

The sensitivity of the topic was identified by several participants in interview as 'emotional' (James) and 'difficult' (McShane) and there was evidence that this may have led to some degree of self-censorship amongst participants. Saunders frequently reinforced civic framing as a

constructive way to navigate what can be an awkward topic (Tankard 2001; Smith 1997). Evidence of this was in rhetorical features: Saunders frequently used the possessive pronoun like ‘our children’, while consistent use of the pronoun ‘we’ by other participants either indicated a preparedness to sponsor civic framing at times (although it was also used to shift the framing to advance the agendas, as demonstrated in the statement by Desmond discussed earlier).

Source selection for the *Community Conversation* was determined by the journalists’ research, their personal contacts, identifying civic officials like James and Polglase and identifying previous media participants and lobbyists McShane and Desmond. Rayner, and his insights into teacher education, was a new voice to the public discussion. While she is a civic official, James had only been the DoE spokeswoman on local radio once before. Having a senior public servant with clients in public conversation was identified by Desmond as a rare and valuable event. Interview data reveals it was made possible through the trust achieved by Gillman’s reassurance to James the ABC’s event would be a different media forum (McNair 2012), and not a combative environment (Bourdieu, 1998; Cottle, 2003). Indeed, Gillman and James identified the perimeters of her engagement as part of negotiations for her to appear. While this can be viewed as a serious limitation to the debate, James’ very involvement and her conduct provided a shift in thinking for McShane, giving a human side to the ‘system’: ‘it was great because you can see that they really do care, they’re genuine people.’

Efforts to create an open, accessible setting for this format away from the ABC Radio studios – importantly with disabled access – emerged as important for participants in interview as did the comfortable face-to-face space for the broadcast (Turkle, 2015; Abercrombie, 1968; Senju and Johnson, 2009). Establishing such a space away for elite deliberations (Harwood, 1991) also improved power relations by removing technical barriers between the presenter and participants.

Despite failing to include a disabled student and the lack of direct contest or conflict over funding, this case study shows the media practices of public broadcasting talk radio can help inform and shift political conversation through listening, civic framing and efforts for diversity with source interaction. Supported by interview data from Desmond and McShane, it is argued the broadcast shifted the families of disabled children closer to Grossberg's (1987) conception of empowerment by connecting them in a different frame to governing institutions, providing a chance for them to voice their needs.

The live and interactive medium of radio was noted by McShane, James, and Desmond as an effective way to foster positive dialogue for public knowledge and change, albeit, in this case, without immediate practical outcome (UNESCO 2017; Cottle, 2002). 'Keyboard warriors' as McShane described social media users, put extreme views forward on social media, often banding together for the same reason. Her assessment that the ABC had 'picked' a wider cross-section highlights the role local media has facilitating diverse public discourse in the digital age. By establishing trust amongst participants and providing a relaxed setting for them to deliberate without the pressure of a pre-determined agenda, the ABC enabled a more nuanced discussion about disability education in Tasmania, which involved subsequent interaction through social media practice and in follow-up radio interviews. In this light, it can be seen to deepen democratic practices (Dewey, 1946; Cottle, 2002; Honneth, 2007). However, given the paucity of audience data, it is not possible to gauge impact further. However, the provision of on-demand audio after the event was recognised by McShane and Desmond as a valuable educational resource for other families with disabled children. Other ways local radio may contribute to social cohesion and build public trust will be points of analysis in the next chapter, Chapter Seven

CHAPTER SEVEN

Community Conversation: International Students in Tasmania (Launceston)

7.1 The issue

International education is currently one of Australia's top service exports, valued at more than \$19 billion and it is projected that Australia's onshore enrolments will grow by around forty-five percent by 2025, which equates to Australia hosting around 720,000 students onshore (Deloitte, 2015b). The sector supports more than 130,000 jobs in Australia and is forecast to be one of the main sectors on a high growth trajectory, acknowledging the significant increase in demand from middle-income economies with large and mobile youth populations (Australian Government, 2016).

To guide growth in the sector, the Federal Government launched Australia's first national strategy for international education on thirtieth of April 2016. It focuses on a number of areas, including improving research and student experience.

The national ten-year blueprint was launched in Launceston, in Northern Tasmania. At the 2016 launch, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Tasmania (UTAS), Professor Peter Rathjen, said Tasmania hosts more than 5,000 international students at university campuses across the island state. Increasing that international student base is part of the inspiration behind a 300-million-dollar investment, in partnership with the Commonwealth, state and local governments, TasTAFE and the Cradle Coast Authority, to build new campuses in central Launceston and Burnie. Enrolments at Launceston's Newnham campus have been dropping five percent each year, with international students sitting at five percent of the student population, compared with future modelling that suggests twenty-six percent at Inveresk.

The University's ambitious business case estimates that it will create 265 new academic and other full-time jobs plus an additional 185 permanent jobs indirectly, boosting Tasmania's economy by \$428m per annum (equivalent to about one-and-a-half percent of 2015-16 gross state product) (Eslake, 2016).

If the targets for increased student enrolments are met, the University's Northern Transformation Project will go far towards reducing the long-standing gaps in educational attainment. As discussed in Chapter One, Tasmania has poor school retention rates and participation in higher education is lower than average. In Tasmania, twenty percent of people aged 25 to 34 have bachelor degree or higher qualifications compared to thirty-two percent nationally (Australian Government, 2013). The University wants to attract 12,000 more students into higher education in northern and north-western Tasmania through the offering of shorter, more flexible and industry-focussed associate degrees, known as Pathway Associate degrees (Eslake, 2016), aimed at attracting large number of Tasmanian young people who are currently not moving into further education.

The Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry is buoyed by the prospect of increased investment, jobs, visitor activity and spending. Its monthly publication, *Tasmanian Business Reporter*, which claims on its masthead to have circulation of 12,000, hailed the announcement with the headline 'Grand Plan for UTAS'. The article claimed a business formula shows that an additional 1000 interstate and international students would inject more than \$30 million annually into the Northern Tasmanian region. The estimated figures are much higher, in the 4000 range, with enormous tourism flow-on effects (O'Meara, 2015).

A lecturer at UTAS Launceston, Dr Michael Powell, challenged the University about the planned relocation to Inveresk, labelling it as 'Grand Facade to a Great Deception' in an article on the online forum *Tasmanian Times*, claiming the proposal lacked a strategy for arresting the

current rate of local student decline and ‘this is not aimed at Tasmanian needs but a nice little revenue earner for the University’ (Powell, 2015). However, the Mayor of Launceston, Albert Van Zettan, and his council are major supporters of the Inveresk project, selling land to the University in 2014 for minimal cost for the construction of 120 student apartments. In an online story, the mayor urged concerned residents to focus on the potential economic benefits because the region had been through ‘a very difficult economic situation’ for several years:

Gross revenue in Launceston fell from \$140 million from 2006 to 2011, \$99 million in wages, exports have been down and value adding in Launceston fell by \$116 million from one census to another. So, we do need some stimulus of major activity and we're hoping that this could be it. (ABC, 2015b)

The region’s financial woes demonstrate the City of Launceston’s reliance on the UTAS project being a success, adding prestige to the city and potentially, attracting many international visitors and possible trade connections. During the 2016 Federal Election, UTAS secured Commonwealth funding to make the Inveresk project a reality.

While international students seek excellence in affordable learning, teaching and research, a positive social experience is high on the list of student wishes. A report released by the International Graduate Insight Group in 2014 surveyed 60,000 international students across 48 universities. It found that international students who made local friends were more satisfied with their international education and more willing to recommend the university to others (Gomes, 2014), so UTAS trumpets Tasmania’s appeal on its website:

The University of Tasmania student experience is not just about study. Students relocating to Tasmania will have the opportunity to visit, explore and encounter World Heritage sites, pristine wilderness, fine food and wines, extraordinary wildlife and a vibrant arts culture. (UTAS, 2017)

Promotion of Tasmania's lifestyle benefits is central to the recruitment drive, particularly in Launceston ahead of the major Inveresk initiative. However, a meeting organised by the Multicultural Council of Tasmania in Launceston in 2014, aimed at gathering feedback on migrants' experiences of living in the state, heard that racism in city is a problem. The Council's Chief Executive Anna Reynolds said racism was a barrier to migrants wanting to integrate into the broader community, forcing them to stay among the groups they were familiar with. At least two people at the meeting said they had objects thrown at them in public in Launceston, accompanied by racial slurs, deemed by *The Examiner* 'not fit for print' (Tang, 2014). The same year, the national media spotlight fell on the anti-social activities of a Launceston football supporter who was evicted from the local Aurora Stadium for racially abusing North Melbourne's Sudanese-born ruckman-forward Majak Daw.

In 2013, Launceston's population was 67,000 and predominantly Australian-born and English speaking. Population statistics from 2011 show only five-point-five percent of the population spoke a language other than English at home (ABS, 2011), including Launceston's high percentage of post war European immigrants and new immigrants from Africa, Bhutan, and the Middle East.

UTAS is already a significant contributor to cultural mix of the city. Of the seven thousand students enrolled in Northern Tasmania in 2013, 1114 were from 61 different countries. According to Vice-Chancellor Rathjen, Launceston was bucking the national trend with international students with a four percent growth in 2012, and an eight percent growth at the Launceston campus: 'This tells us we have a real opportunity working in partnership with the local community to add to the economic, cultural and social fabric of Northern Tasmania. (Gallasch, 2013b) and he attributed success to a strategic business and community alliance with the campaigns *Love Launceston* and *Learning Launceston*. The former is supported by the

Chamber of Commerce, and *The Examiner* newspaper. Most of the local media coverage in 2013 of international students in Launceston framed Launceston as a welcoming, inclusive community: ‘Warm city welcome for international students’ (*The Examiner*, 2013a) and ‘Home and away on Radar’ (Gallasch, 2012), featuring UTAS community development officer, Jo Archer, promoting economic and social benefits for the local community:

The international students coming to Australia are regarded as the future potential leaders in their home countries and building ties with them and their country now, can only be of benefit to Tasmania down the track. (Gallasch, 2012)

Archer emphasises local economic benefits, a framing approach designed to encourage more public support and acceptance of the students. The economic and reputational gain for Launceston is a frequently reinforced: ‘Launceston will become world leader in marine research’ (Wahlquist, 2013), and ‘Launceston envisioned as busy vibrant city’ (Martin, 2013). In March 2013, Archer organised a UTAS student welcome event for 100 international students at the city’s main mall ‘like great big city hug’ (*The Examiner*, 2013a).

A key silence in local media coverage, however, was the issue of racism. Most of the stories on racism in *The Examiner* that year were syndicated stories about issues and analysis in response to national events such as ‘Racism’s raw side exposed’ (Baker, 2013) after a spectator in Melbourne called Indigenous AFL footballer Adam Goodes an ‘ape’. In the wake of this event and in response to some anti-Muslim events overseas, *The Examiner* ran an editorial titled ‘Who are the real bad guys?’ appealing for social tolerance and criticising of anti-Muslim campaigns on social media:

So, it's up to us then – we play a role too. Not through ignorant campaigns against Muslims converting people through halal food and Islamic prayer in schools, but through support, education, compassion and understanding. (*The Examiner*, 2013b)

The call for compassion and tolerance in this editorial is presented in civic frames, representative of an agenda seeking social inclusion, tolerance and safety. This theme again emerged later in the year in an article with the headline 'Move to help Hazara settlers feel at home' (Maloney, 2013), which highlighted the need for better support for the new settlers in Launceston. It was a story about a plan from John Brown from the Multicultural Council to develop an awareness campaign in schools and the broader community about Launceston's newly established Hazara residents in an effort to build compassion for the new settlers and to ward off any possible instances of racism. Brown said: 'Launceston has a tradition of migrant settlement but where people are coming from has changed' (Maloney, 2013).

7.2 The *Conversation* event

Establishing the *Conversation*

The topic was decided after the big UTAS student recruitment event in Launceston's mall. Chris Ball, producer of Northern Tasmania *Drive* said he and presenter Damien Brown said the program wanted to focus on the expanding economy of international students. Content Director Michael Merrington said while student recruitment was boosting local business, he was also aware of rising racial tension linked to the campaign:

There's a bit of a, I guess, culture clash with the fact that a lot of these students are living out in some of the more socio-economically poor parts of the city and they perhaps are not treated as well as they would be if they were living somewhere else and also that they may think that's what the rest of the community is like and they're not at all. So, yeah, there's been some challenges there. (Merrington, interview, 26.9.13)

Merrington here raises some complex and sensitive issues; linkages between socio-economic status in Launceston, cultural awareness and differing community standards ‘somewhere else’ in the city. Merrington said ABC Radio had attempted in the past to explore reports of racial tension in more detail however it is: ‘One of those issues nobody really wants to talk about because I guess it’s embarrassing for a lot of people as well’ (Merrington, interview, 26.9.13).

Brown invited Jo Archer to participate in the *Community Conversation* and she was keen for the opportunity to: ‘build the capacity of people in this region to understand and become more experienced at dealing with cultural diversity’, an agenda that she claimed was supported by some of the ABC staff:

...If we are going to become a more inclusive community, we need to be singing from similar hymn books, those of us who are in a position to influence groups of people. And that it was a good and responsible message for media to be propagating as well. (Archer, interview, 1.8.13)

While this suggests an agreement between participants to pursue this specific agenda, that journalists were aligned with an elite agenda (Herman and Chomsky, 1988; McChesney, 1999; Couldry, 2008), it is a claim not raised nor confirmed by any ABC staff in interview. However, Brown spoke with then booked another key member of the *Love Launceston* lobby group, Michael Bailey from the Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce (TCCI), to provide a business perspective about international students in the community. Archer said she and Bailey collaborated before the event on what messaging they would prioritise:

... We talked about, rather than us both going and talking about the economics of a situation, I talked, we agreed that I would talk more about our aim to build tolerance and awareness in the community and that that would be more a focus of where my discussion would be and that we, that he had stats and figures and the economics of it. So rather than us both trying to dabble there, we agreed on what we might focus on. (Archer, interview, 1.8.13.)

This alliance was determined to advance the progress agenda of the *Love Launceston* group. Natalie De Vito, Festival Director of the Junction Arts Festival, was asked by Ball to participate as she involved with consultation and social integration projects in the arts sector and is known, from previous appearances on ABC Northern Tasmania, as an adept media performer. De Vito, who is from Toronto, Canada, said in interview the fact she was a ‘foreigner’ from a large, more culturally diverse city might have had some influence in her inclusion on the panel. She wanted the broadcast to tackle issues like racial tolerance.

On a personal level, I was interested in probably that kind of conversation becoming more open and moving from a larger issue, especially given boat policies and foreign immigration policies, but how that actually gets translated into a very local and regional context and how local businesses and individuals can actually make a difference and what that might look like. (DeVito, interview, 18.9.13)

DeVito here makes a distinction between government policy issues to the experiences happening at the local level, which she hoped could be improved by practical and useful inclusion.

Ball was mindful of the ABC’s strategic aim of achieving more diversity when putting the panel together and sought to include the experiences of international students through the curation of vox pops. In interview, he said several students were invited to join the discussion panel, but did not accept and he could not recollect in interview why. Two students, however, did accompany Archer to the ABC studios to watch the broadcast.

Instead, the production team sought to include the experiences of international students through the curation of vox pops, recorded at the mall welcome event mentioned earlier. Even though the Migrant Resource Centre (MRC) does not represent international students, Ball invited a representative to join the discussion as he said in interview they are ‘new immigrants to the area too.’ MRC business manager and community development officer, John Ali, who had moved to Launceston from South Sudan viewed it as an important opportunity to explain how different cultural differences, like new arrivals not meeting the eyes of local shopkeepers, can sometimes provoke negative responses:

It doesn’t mean that they’re ignoring you. To them, it is respect. And the Australian people they say, ‘He’s rude, he’s ignoring me’. So, these are the things that people need to understand. (Ali, interview, 18.9.13)

What Ali highlights is a lack of public knowledge about cultural behaviours at work in social relations in Launceston, and he said such ignorance or a lack of awareness is hindering social inclusion and sometimes leading to hostile reactions. In terms of communicating messages or raising awareness about such issues, his organisation is not on Facebook or Twitter, he said, because there is no time to manage the accounts and hence, moderate any responses they may get which suggests fear of online abuse. Content director Michael Merrington was asked by this researcher about efforts made by the program team to bring other perspectives into the *Community Conversation*:

JN: Are you aware of whether or not the program team tried to get somebody to speak against the increase of international students?

MM: No, I don’t think we did but, cause we had the Migrant Resource Centre and we had Chamber of Commerce, and we had the university but you know, that’s probably an aspect that

as I say, probably nobody's going to come out and say, you know, that it's a bad thing to have the big industry for Tasmania really, for international students. (Merrington, interview, 26.9.13)

This judgment that it would be unlikely anyone would object against a big industry for Tasmania, without the effort to identify potential protesters, raises interesting questions about individual biases and the relationship of local journalists and the dominant wielders of economic power in Launceston.

The *Conversation* logistics

Community Conversation: International Students in Tasmania (Launceston) was held on 4 March 2013 and broadcast on ABC Northern Tasmania, hosted by Damien Brown, produced by Ball and multiplatform reporter Tim Walker, overseeing online and social media coverage. Merrington was not in the studios for the event, but listened while travelling in the car on another assignment.

The *Community Conversation* was held in the foyer of the ABC Broadcast Centre in Launceston in front of seven onlookers; mostly friends and associates of the participants including two international students. It is not known how they interacted with each other and other event participants, if at all. Participants were gathered around a table tennis table and were seated facing each other. In interview, Ball said face-to-face interaction was an important and deliberate part of the design as improves the quality of the social interaction, creating more comfortable and insightful radio:

The best contact with people, the best friendships you make are when you're sitting opposite or standing opposite them. You can strike a little bit of a friendship on the phone. You can't strike up friendships and relationships unless you actually sit opposite one another and I know that you know of the conversations we've had, has

strengthened those ties with people. Once people know who you are they feel freer to actually contact you. (Ball, interview, 19.9.13)

This demonstrates the importance of this human connection in facilitating social interaction and building trust, which deepens connections amongst the community for content makers at the ABC. Like its ABC Hobart sister station, this *Community Conversation* event was broadcast in *Drive*, starting at 16.05pm after the news bulletin. It was broadcast only on analogue, as regional radio streaming was unavailable until 2015.

Brown introduced the conversation with an invitation for people to call into the Broadcast Centre to watch, or interact with the event via social media or by posting comment on the station's website. Unlike the 936 ABC Hobart event discussed in the Chapter Seven, Brown elected not to be accompanied by co-hosts in the broadcast. He introduced and then proceeded to interview the guests in this order; Bailey, Archer, De Vito and Ali.

Discourse features of the *Conversation*

Brown opened with a few broad questions for the listening audience: ‘Any ideas on how to improve the advantages for foreign students? Perhaps you think we don’t need them. Perhaps there are better ways that we can accommodate for them.’

Before asking any questions of guests, Brown said they should first ‘Hear the voices of the people that we’re talking about today’ and played two minutes and twenty seconds of vox populi of students at the welcome event in the Launceston Mall about why the students came to study in Launceston. Responses included the reputation of the University, quality of the courses, affordability, the opportunity to study in English, uncrowded scenery, and friendly people. Content makers could not recollect if any negative comments were recorded. The positive vox pops, consistent with the UTAS PR campaign, were reinforced by Archer’s persuasive strategy that Launceston should consider, and present, itself as highly attractive to students:

Not every student from every country wants to live in the fast lane and as we’ve just heard, many enjoy the beauty and the peace and the attributes that Launceston can offer that other destinations can’t. (Archer, *CC*, 4.3.13)

The truth modality expressed above advances Archer’s advocacy of UTAS as a student destination with obligation modality about the broader community’s role in making students more welcome, ensuring important economic growth for the region:

...It’s also about the communities preparing themselves and working with the university to be more appealing to students. Ultimately the university’s job is to get as many students educated as possible. It’s the destinations that must make their own campuses attractive. (Archer, *CC*, 4.3.13)

This challenge is presented as a shared community responsibility for Launceston – how to make international students more welcome and less isolated. DeVito establishes an important theme of human impact by sharing her insights of working with ‘new migrant families, who are just learning English and trying to integrate into the city and it’s extremely difficult’, reinforced by her personal experience of exclusion: ‘I don’t know if you can actually ever be a Tasmanian unless you were born here’ (DeVito, interview, 18.9.13).

DeVito’s comment is a challenge to what she sees as the closed mindset of the community. Yet Brown avoids exploring it further and instead moves on with a question to Chamber of Commerce’s Bailey about the economic benefits international students bring to Launceston, allowing him to advance persuasive strategy in economic frames, reinforcing Archer’s strategic agenda:

It’s really important I believe that our communities remember that for every international student, every student will generate in addition to their fees, about \$40,000 per year in additional spend in a market place....now we see international students as being an export and we really need to. We need to understand that it’s an economic benefit to our community, that’s clear, that’s measurable and it can grow. (Bailey, CC, 4.3.13)

Describing how it makes good business sense for Launceston to support the growth of education sector, Bailey does not recognise the needs or contributions of domestic students in this discussion about the University and international student growth . He shifts focus with civic framing onto the potential social benefits of an increased international student population for residents of the small city.

We're an island state, we tend to get very inward looking and access to people from around the globe is really, really important for our communities so that we see the world as it is, a bigger place with a whole range of diversity and a whole range of opportunities for us to link into and for them to link into us. (Bailey, CC, 4.3.13)

Bailey refers to the insularity of Launceston residents as a barrier to diversity, inferring it is part informed by the limited experience and education of many Tasmanians, arguably linked to economic and social challenges outlined in Chapter One. This truth modality is sponsored by personalisation from Archer who said that after years of Melbourne, she found Launceston 'downright dreary' without the richness of the diversity international students bring to the city. She asserts credibility of her persuasive strategy for social change with this quote, possibly aimed at more conservative members of the community: 'I'm saying this as a seventh-generation Tasmanian, so I can get away with anything.' Consistent with the agenda shared by Bailey, she employs economic framing advocacy for the community to be more enthusiastic about social change international residents might present:

You know, we need parents having their kids interacting with children from other cultures and we need greater interaction because they are going to be the countries we trade, well we already are, trading but we need to trade with a greater level of understanding of the global environment. (Archer, CC, 4.3.13)

The focus on more diverse social interaction features an obligation modality framed towards the future, reinforcing UTAS and TCCI's advocacy agenda. Again, there is also frequent use of the pronoun 'we' suggestive of a shared, civic approach and mutual agenda-setting.

Consensus that Launceston needs to work on ways to better support international students and migrants emerges in interview with the participants, but also from an assessment of key words in this conversation. 'Community' emerges as the most frequently used word, used sixteen

times. The word 'racism' however only appears three times, which is an interesting silence given that it is an identified problem with the international student experience and fuelling tensions in Launceston. Given the symbolic power of the word, the low frequency highlights that counting is not always an accurate reflection of impact. It also raises questions about recognition. As discussed in Chapter three, a sense of security based on mutual recognition is important to citizens' security and experiences of racism undermine the ability of migrants to feel 'at home', and hence their capacity to exist as citizens (Noble, 2005). Brown seems reluctant to even raise the issue: 'I know I have to mention the 'R' word, but is there an issue with racism?' John Ali does not directly respond to that question, suggesting some level of self-censorship. He opts to share his personal experience, suggesting it is not abnormal for migrants to encounter rude behaviour or questions from people:

Unless that person takes it too far like consistently doing that thing or aggressively trying to assault you then that becomes really a problem. But I'm sure these kind of things, as you are in a new place, you have to understand and accept that these things are going to be there and the best way to do it is to find a way of dealing with it in a very diplomatic way so that you don't either hurt him or he hurts you or anything like that. (Ali, CC, 4.3.13)

With these examples of racism, Ali reveals a strong sense of powerlessness amongst migrants to deal with such challenges other than find diplomatic resolution. There is no reference to social support structures. The tension between newcomers and locals, according to Natalie DeVito is expressed as a truth modality that Launceston lacks important 'visual representation' of diversity and migrant and international students simply don't feel comfortable coming into 'a very white downtown business core in a very small city'. She said Launceston needs to invest in more welcoming city spaces and activities to advance change. This suggestion, framed in civic terms, is sponsored by Bailey who concedes the business community needs to 'ensure

that a bit of the clumsiness that we have around international people is eradicated'. Bailey exhibits cohesion with DeVito's obligation modality to 'foster that kind of visual relationship' and he advances solutions framing by highlighting better collaboration:

I think we're just beginning to understand as a business community how we can leverage those links better, how we can offer a better level of service, how we can offer simple things in communities like, you know, prayer rooms and signage that makes sense, etc., that you know, we need to continue to work on and it's got to be through collaboration. It's going to be through working with groups like the university, with groups like the Migrant Resource Centre, to make sure that we get things right. And I don't think anyone in the State would think that we have things quite right yet. (Bailey, CC, 4.3.13)

This concession from the spokesman from the business community, representative of dominant economic forces in Northern Tasmania, acknowledges an awareness that the business sector needs to change and develop cultural awareness to maximise Launceston's appeal to international students and secure economic returns. Personalising the challenge is Bailey's way to shift thinking amongst TCCI's membership:

And what I like to tell our members is that, you know, just imagine if you had your child going to study in a different country. In a country that they couldn't speak English, in a country that was different and challenging, how would you want that interaction to be? How would you like that to be for them? And to me, I think every Tasmanian needs to think about that and to remember you know, we can really be a very important part of this link to these critical people for our economy. And we're talking hundreds of millions of dollars State-wide into our economy each year. (Bailey, CC, 4.3.13)

This is aimed at eliciting empathy, generating impact and prompts the radio listening audience to reflect on the impact their own behaviour and attitudes. While clearly advancing the TCCI-

UTAS agenda, this civic framing highlights community responsibility toward diversity and social inclusion.

When asked by Brown at the conclusion of the broadcast for some examples of quick action Tasmania could do better with international students, Archer's advice was an immediate and practical: 'If you're a business, spend some money training your staff on how to interact better and more effectively with new comers.' Ali said: 'Be more welcoming and more open to share what we have got and to accept each other as a community.' Both these statements challenge the current social and political order in Launceston.

The *Conversation* online

Three days before the broadcast event, Ball posted a story on the ABC Northern Tasmania web site, asking: 'Do we really go the distance to make overseas people feel part of our community...or are we just kidding ourselves.' Comments to this are closed and hence are not available for analysis. The preview story also featured some vox pops from students about Tasmania as a place to study. No negative commentary about international students was included in the posting. Engagement on Twitter and Facebook was not available for analysis.

Ongoing engagement after the broadcast was encouraged (ABC, 2013e), with a recording of the event posted online on the website. ABC analytics via *Webtrends* six months after the event showed that the audio had been accessed 101 times. The online story, by Walker, which accompanied the audio file carried an inaccuracy about student numbers so Archer contacted the station for a correction.

7.2.1 Participant reflection and impact

Conversation participants

Five months after the event, I travelled to Launceston and conducted semi-structured interviews with Jo Archer, Natalie De Vito and John Ali. Michael Bailey was not available. John Ali was prepared to be a lot more open and detailed in interview about experiences of racism in Launceston.

JA: ...The people who do it they know that it's not right to do it. They will not do it openly. They do it when they know they can, there's no witness, you can't do nothing about it because even if you go to the police, you need evidence otherwise you not get anyway and it would be a waste of time.

JN: What sort of things are you referring to?

JA: I'm referring to things like somebody comes and just calls you, 'you monkey, you black, you nigger', and things like that...there are people who damage houses. They go throw eggs and things like that. They vandalise it, write things on it and they write bad stuff on them. (Ali, interview, 18.9.13)

Ali's reflections are more powerful than what was shared during the broadcast event, and he was asked why. Ali said he was uncomfortable going into too much detail on the radio as it could provoke the wrong sort of response, potentially creating more trouble for migrants. This raises questions about fear and the constraints of speaking publically about uncomfortable social issues. Sharing his personal experience on the radio, he said, was a deliberate effort to increase the community's understanding:

The reason I do that is, if I don't say, nobody will know I have this experience and it's an opportunity for people to know that something like this is happening or

happened and if you have something to do about it, you can do about it, if you want it know it, it's up to whoever hears it. But as part of emotional healing sometimes it's good to talk about your experiences. (Ali, interview, 18.9.13)

While this comment highlights the importance of the expression of voice in terms of social inclusion and understanding and the power of personal narrative, Ali's need to self-censor during the broadcast event raises questions about social power relations and his fear about the potential for harm to migrants should he go into too much detail about what MRC members experience in the neighbourhoods of Launceston. Ali's personal account of difficult experiences, said Archer was moving and powerful:

Just him talking about how he felt. How he viewed his position in this society and I think if somebody read what he said, it wouldn't have conveyed the emotion and the intensity of what he passed on through that interview. So, I think there's definitely a more emotive opportunity through radio. (Archer, interview, 1.8.13)

Archer highlights the potential of live radio to affect listeners, as opposed to print which Archer sees 'is just fact'. She contends racism in Launceston is not a structural problem: 'A lot of behaviours that were being labelled as "racist" indeed really aren't racism, they're inexperience', later claiming that it often came from retail or service staff who may not have travelled beyond Launceston. Hence, she sees a big need for better public knowledge in the Northern Tasmanian community about cultural diversity:

We have to acknowledge if something good happens and talk about it and can motivate those who are doing it. If there's something bad, well yes, something bad will have to also be there and say, 'That thing happened and how we can correct it'. The most important thing is how we can reverse it to stop it from happening again which is good for society. (Archer, interview, 1.8.13)

This reference to an inclusive social ‘good’ can be viewed as serving the economic agenda, set by UTAS and TCCI, but also indicative of the civic framing that emerged through the *Conversation* which was sponsored, at various times, by all participants.

I can’t see other ways where a community can be inspired to think about an issue, and it may, you know, it mightn’t be about this, it might be the plight, what it means not having freight services leaving the State. What does that mean to the people that live in your street or the farmer down the road that you know? And we don’t get that, that humanising through other media. So, I think that that’s where ABC and programs of this format have a very important part to play. (Archer, interview, 1.8.13)

Archer highlights the impact of local media educating, as well as informing, a community with personal stories identified as essential for social inclusion. DeVito said the setting and conduct of the *Community Conversation* with face-to-face interaction between participants ‘did facilitate a conversation’, allowing a diversity of views to emerge. However, she noted the broadcast event lacked the voice of someone opposed to migration or boosting international students.

JN: Do you think that would have been hard to find that voice?

ND: I don’t actually, unfortunately but maybe it was, which would be really great.

Citing her international experiences and work in community engagement, DeVito described public broadcasting radio as ‘the most precise, objective, informed form of communication’ available in Launceston:

ND: I don't regard the newspapers, the local newspapers that we have as being anything suitable of reporting. So, in that respect I think that it actually, if there's an opportunity to, I think there is a space for that kind of community engagement with the rigour of the reporting and objectivity that provides that kind of subjective opportunity into a space that I don't think exists.

JN: And you know in terms of democracy and you know, community functioning, what's the value of that, that there is that opportunity for the voices to be heard?

ND: Well I don't, I think, I don't think that, currently some of the papers function more like tabloids and so, and it's, well, you know, everything is skewed to a particular political leaning in part, that's unavoidable. But I think the more the agendas can be sidelined or opened up to allow for a diverse range of comments. (DeVito, interview, 18.9.13)

Here DeVito's comments feature an obligation modality for more collaborative media engagement at the local level exhibiting rigour and objectivity, creating a participatory culture which allows more diversity. Based his past interactions with ABC journalists, Ali said he had trust in the public broadcaster to constructively raise the level of awareness about challenges faced by the migrant community and this public awareness is critical to ensuring social integration and harmony in Launceston:

I think changing the attitude is the responsibility of all the community, the people and the government. So that if the neighbours, the other people are watchful and they see something happen and they stand for it, to support these people, and if these people are brought, identified or found they can then be dealt with by the law and it reassures them, the victims that, yep, they are being looked after. If the things continue happening and nothing is done, and the only thing you think is, you begin to lose the sense of belonging, you now come to convince yourself that I don't belong here, that's why these things happen and there's nobody who's going to help me. And this is not a good thing for society. (Ali, interview, 18.9.13)

Ali contends it is a collective responsibility to create a more tolerant community. Improving the safety and wellbeing of newcomers, says Ali would improve their sense of welcome and

belonging in Launceston, meeting the ambitions of the business community and UTAS to attract more international students.

Conversation content makers

Ball said the broadcast revealed not only the economic benefit international students bring to Launceston, but how challenging and uncomfortable the experience of settling into this city could be for newcomers. As discussed earlier, racism had generally been framed in conflict terms or even avoided in local media discourse so Ball said the fact it emerged in the *Community Conversation* improved social inclusion:

If we don't actually talk about the bad then we're not reflecting our community...If somebody brings up the fact that you know, there's a bit of racism in this town, that you know, the students face it, this is what happens, we've got to tell people about it and also, and suggest ways we can overcome it, suggest ways the way we can overcome and how our students can react differently and contribute to more harmony. (Ball, interview, 19.9.13)

In this quotation, Ball contends that local media should not only to inform the community, but adopt in a community-building role to focus on positive social change.

This emphasis on providing solutions is consistent with Archer's suggestion that the ABC team had a shared agenda with UTAS and TCCI to boost cultural harmony and expand the lucrative international student population. This was not confirmed in interviews with Ball or Merrington.

The lack of effort by the program team to include the views of people opposed or concerned about the expansion of international students, mentioned by Merrington in the previous section, raises important questions about local media and its relationship with dominant political and

economic powers. It also highlights the influence of bias from journalists, influenced by life experience, race and education .

In terms of pursuing diversity, Mark Scott said journalists need to go beyond their professional and personal connections:

...When you are mixing with people who are highly educated or part of the media elite like you are, even when it comes to your discussions around the production table about what stories you're going to cover, what's important, what people are thinking about, it's inevitable that you are informed by your life experience and you are informed by what's important to you, what's important to your friends, what people around you are talking about and so part of the great challenge I think is to kind of get out and to really come to a deeper insight and understanding of the world beyond your cocoon. (Scott, interview, 24.5.13)

In order to pursue diversity at both content and source levels, Ball said a change to radio program workflows is needed, to allow journalists the time to deepen research and find new voices from their local community:

...By going out in the community and those communities demonstrates to people listening that we do care about their communities and we're in their communities talking about issues that might impinge upon them...It's easy to say, oh the same set of issues, problems, solutions could be the same as say Toowoomba, or Karratha, but they're not, they're our people experiencing certain things and it's probably our job to reflect that. (Ball, interview, 19.9.13)

Ball demonstrates a high level of personal commitment to the ABC's professional ideology (ABC, 2017b) with these comments. The *ABC Equity and Diversity Plan* (ABC, 2016c) was not in effect at the time of the broadcast, so the team was not working to the specific targets and guidelines outlined in that policy. Despite the audience having an increasing choice of

media sources and ways of engagement in debate via the internet, Ball said the medium of radio, with participatory formats like *Community Conversations*, generates fresh, locally relevant content which he believes enriches public discourse and builds citizen engagement:

...If we sat in our studios and talked to something about, some politician about something, and in recent times it seems to all go around in circles all the time and we don't break out of those circles, find the truth to the issue and broadcast the issue and get reaction to that, the real issue then I think they turn off. And it's not just the young people turning off, I think other people will start to turn off too because they're just sick, they get sick of the ping pong factor, he said, she said, you know, people just want you to get on with it and explore the issues and I think this is the way to do that. (Ball, interview, 19.9.13)

These insights are consistent with research about the current standard of much of the media and political discourse in Australia and how people are switching off from more superficial and combative forums, as discussed in Chapter Two.

Aftermath

Based on feedback from UTAS and from the wider community after the event, Archer said the broadcast expanded public awareness about the opportunities and challenges of increasing the international student population in Launceston. She shared the link to the online audio file widely with a number of community groups and businesses. One reaction she said she found particularly pleasing were calls from a variety of people asking what they could do to help international students, including an approach from Rotary clubs to hear more about UTAS international students and how they could be better supported:

I think the people that picked it up and came to us saw it within the perspective of that conversation, that it wasn't economic benefit, it, there were people that we were treating badly, there were people that are feeling unwelcome and frightened here and you don't often get a chance to say all that yourself. So, I think those perspectives there were valuable in conveying a broader, a more holistic picture. (Archer, interview, 1.8.13)

Archer emphasises the power and effectiveness of personal narratives building broader awareness and knowledge in the media about local issues. DeVito said she learnt a lot from the discussion and was pleased that it produced some practical and positive suggestions:

...About the need for local shops to be trained in being able to respond to people who don't necessarily speak English, or who come from different cultures, I thought was really interesting as a possible potential outcome that the business community could take on to help support that. There were some things that I thought were really interesting just on a general level that I thought could be very easily taken up by numerous groups and individuals. (DeVito, interview, 18.9.13)

While specific and practical ways to improve international student experience in Launceston emerged from the *Conversation*, she was not convinced that translating them into reality was a priority for some (unnamed) in the group.

I like thinking about ideas but then I want to see them put into place, so I want to have that conversation and have more people aware of it but then it's too easy to just say, 'oh yeah, that's great, we should do that', and then it gets left to someone else to do. So how can we use those kind of formats and opportunities to engage other people and try to get people to commit to doing something or doing. (DeVito, interview, 18.9.13)

DeVito raises an interesting question about how collaborative media events could be supported by community mechanisms to shift talk to action. For John Ali from the Migrant Resource

Centre, being able to access and share his experiences with ABC Local Radio gave him a sense of inclusion: ‘I feel it, this is ours, which is for us and can be there any time I need it and access it. I feel I have ownership of it.’

7.3 Discussion

Analysis of the empirical research data from this *Community Conversation* provides important insights into three of my research questions. It will firstly be reviewed in relation to the ways public broadcasting radio can contribute to democratic health, by aiding participation and representation. Then, it will explore what specific local radio broadcasting and engagement practices improve public debate and political conversation on radio, contributing to social cohesion and building public trust.

This *Community Conversation* helped to bring to the surface some – but not all – perspectives on racism, a major challenge Northern Tasmania needs to address as part of its ambitious expansion of the international education sector. It also raised some potential practical solutions like training for retail staff in the city. Community ignorance, occasional hostility towards and a lack of support for migrants emerged as key themes. What was also central to the conversation was the economic imperative for these issues to be addressed.

As John Ali pointed out, the ABC has a role in educating the public but without the inclusion of an international student as part of the forum or someone opposed to the expansion of this form of economic expansion in Launceston, this function appears undermined. In interview, content maker Ball did state that at the local level journalists have an even wider role – suggesting ways to change what is happening in the community, focusing on positive social change (Wenzel et al., 2016), and providing opportunity for the diversity of experiences to be shared: ‘Community outreach works well for local radio.’ While this ideological orientation of

the ABC content makers towards the importance of diversity may have emerged in interview, it was restricted in delivery by the selection of sources. As discussed, no one opposed to international student development was represented and interview data suggests that content makers had determined that no-one was likely to oppose 'big industry', reinforcing research that the influence of local politicians and business people can make for a more problematic environment due to local journalists' proximity to these interests (Richards, 2013; Curran et al., 2014; Altheide 1976; Epstein, 1973).

It was not established why students refused the opportunity to be interview, as content makers when asked in interview could not recollect. Previous research into newsroom routines determine who is most likely to be heard: the easy-to-get-to and usually articulated 'authorized knowers' (Ericson et al., 1987:32) which puts minority groups at a disadvantage (van Dijk, 2002; Poole, 2000). However, it is interesting to note that John Ali first encountered the ABC as a student and that experience provided him with the trust and confidence to engage again. A key gap in the data gathered is why students did not want to participate in this event. It raises questions about ways that local media can engage and empower those who don't present with confidence, if their English is poor, they are not groomed, they are not in control of their emotions or they represent a distortion of accepted convention which impacts on how the audience may judge them (Phillips and Tapsell, 2007:25).

While a student was not included in the discussion, Ball's effort for the experiences of newcomers to Launceston to be somehow represented demonstrates that much depends on the behaviour of public broadcasting journalism (Collins and Murrone, 1996; Vatsikopolous, 2013; Weisser, 2013). Good faith and recognition demonstrated by the program team gave Ali confidence to participate. and his voice meant the discussion surfaced the topic of racism, described by Merrington to be 'one of those issues nobody really wants to talk about.' The expressive force of his personal story provided a powerful insight into the discussion (Kuhne

and Schemer, 2013; Kunelius and Renwall, 2010). The function of public service media therefore to provide spaces and forms of journalism to explore such issues and promote national, regional, and local identities, is seen by some scholars as more urgent now than it has ever been. (Dahlgren, 1999; McChesney, 1999; Hutchinson, 1999).

Face-to-face interaction gave rise to ‘affective states’ (Tebbutt 2006:859), with Archer later recounting in interview the emotion she felt hearing and seeing Ali describe how he had been treated. While perceptions of such interactivity undoubtedly differ (Downes and McMillan, 2000; Coleman et al., 2008; Sohn et al., 2005), it does return us to the importance of journalists providing opportunities for participation. In this case, public broadcaster values guiding source relations and framing approaches were highly influential (Bourdieu, 1998; Cottle, 2003) but there was an (unconfirmed) reference by Archer to the journalists being part of dominant local agenda, consistent with research (Donohue et al., 1995; Tichenor et al., 1980) suggesting that local news media is deeply influenced by local community structures, with journalists serving groups which have some influence, power and resources. This raises the importance of media organisations prioritising diversity with recruitment and retention of media practitioners from a diversity of socio-economic, ethnic, and geographic backgrounds to guard against insularity of attitudes and approaches (Jakubowicz et al., 2016; Sambrook, 2016; Stroud, 2010; PWC Australia, 2016).

Despite reliance on UTAS and TCCI as sources, the determination by Ball to include Ali and DeVito as participants, helped shift the discourse away from the strategic agenda from Archer and Bailey. It was, in part, an opportunity for different voices to be heard (Couldry, 2003; Turner, 2005), enabling some differences to be respected and common understandings to be articulated. The lack of contribution from international students however is significant and in fact, it can be argued the event served to marginalise the international students even more through their exclusion

The collaboration did however focus on building the capacity of people in the region to understand and become more experienced at dealing with cultural diversity (Dueze et al., 2007; McChesney and Picard, 2011; Rafael and La Rose, 1993) with efforts made for a socially inclusive approach specific to Northern Tasmania, highlighting ways local journalism can foster social cohesion and identity (McNair, 2009; Janowitz, 1952). In interview, Bailey acknowledged that the business community needed to make some changes – improve their ‘clumsiness’ and consider public access to spaces for services like prayer rooms.

Journalists shape information according to certain news production routines (Altheide, 1976, 1978; Gans, 1979). The collaboration and framing approach adopted by the ABC content makers gave some participants confidence to take part, building public trust in the media and contributing to social cohesion. Without data about why international students decline the invitation to participate, it is difficult to analyse this further. One of the conditions necessary for an open and inclusive formative environment, recognition (Mansbridge, 2012; Honneth, 1995), was arguably compromised by limited source relations and a strategic agenda by TCCI and UTAS, which can be seen as undermining democratic expectations that every citizen is entitled to feel authentically represented (Greider, 2010:10), and how consensus demands one goes beyond self-interest to orient oneself to a common good (Bohman, 1998).

Analysis of discourse features shows Brown shifted discourse at critical moments, like when DeVito suggested you can only be Tasmanian ‘if you are born here’, suggesting that the presenter may have been trying to avoid conflict, or attempting to ensure other agendas were achieved. The concept of conversation argues not just for an active audience but for journalists to reimagine their work as a social practice, engaging in a dialogue with readers/listeners as equal participants in that process (Anderson et al., 1996). However, the format pursued by the Brown with a linear line of questioning did not allow meaningful democratic deliberations or

debate (Marchionni, 2013), as he retained control as gatekeeper to the conversation, behaviour seen (Gillmor, 2008; Briggs, 2010; Shirky, 2008) as democratically restrictive.

UTAS and the TCCI were united in their strategic advocacy framing and were unchallenged, prompting questions about the position held by the ABC content makers in the community (Nielsen, 2015a, Gans, 1979), and those disenfranchised by 'dominant set of political and cultural codes and practices' (Flew, 1991:29). Analysis of the discourse features does however, show a significant shift from their dominant theme of the economic opportunity and 'making students welcome', to addressing a sensitive challenge identified as something the community must address if the recruitment drive is to be successful; cultural ignorance and racism. While this case study lacked key insights and the availability of online data, analysis of discourse features showed that the inclusion and contributions of Ali and DeVito as sources was highly influential. Using strong human impact themes, their personal and authentic storytelling about their experiences of culturally adjusting to Launceston advanced a case for social change. The solutions-orientated framing which emerged during the radio event, said Archer, showed 'a community can be inspired to think about an issue', highlighting expectations that local media will lead and provoke communities (Poindexter et al., 2006; Moy et al., 2004; Haas, 2007). With analysis generated from this chapter and the preceding two chapters, this thesis is now equipped to form conclusions in relation to its guiding research questions.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

8.1 Introduction

As discussed at the start of this thesis, journalism as a profession is at the crossroads on a frantic and chaotic highway of social, economic, and political change. It is difficult time for public communication. Disruption to the business of traditional media outlets means challenges in reaching broad audiences at a time when people are inclined to focus more on narrow sources that confirm and existing views. Social media has swamped news – threatening the funding and execution of public interest reporting and leading to a more polarised political landscape. The rationale for public service media is under increased pressure, traditional media businesses are going broke and low public trust in media is undermining ‘the kind of public culture needed for a healthy democracy’ (Dahlgren, 2003:151). It is happening so fast that academic researchers and industry commentators are struggling to make sense of it all. So too are politicians and the people they represent. With media and democracy intertwined, the contemporary situation is creating anxiety about democratic processes: whose voice is being heard and what can be done to protect and indeed improve public and political discourse?

Audiences are consuming more entertainment-focused and PR-driven content, usually on their smartphones. With most people using Facebook to access news, the power of algorithms and referrals is also posing a new set of challenges about how society is informed and engaged. Commercial or political misinformation is proliferating via increasingly popular social networks and their algorithms perpetuate online ‘echo chambers’ (Boaden, 2016; Pariser, 2015; Halavais, 2013; Bell, 2014). Media business models are buckling under the dual pressure of

people not being prepared to pay for news, and an increasing reliance on distribution intermediaries, specifically the US internet giants Google and Facebook. Increasingly polarised political arguments and deliberate misinformation in the media are becoming part of what is regarded as news content, as highlighted by three major political campaigns in 2016. Lack of media diversity, media over-reliance on polling, and a tendency towards easy talk or online content over newsgathering like fact checking or diverse, complex public debate, have all been identified as contributing to the malaise. So too have high levels of civic disengagement and distrust in the media and public institutions in western democracies. The idea of democracy implies ideally a public life in which people think critically about solutions to problems and act in the public interest or ‘common good’ and a well-functioning democracy requires a healthy ecosystem of trust-tellers (Callahan, 2017). Without some level of conflict, agonists argue democracy loses its egalitarian and inclusive ethos (Mouffe, 2000; Fraser, 1990), yet the very search for consensus opens up the political terrain to social learning (Vasilev 2015) and the educative impact of discursive interaction requires consensus for its very formation, enabling participants to learn something from placing themselves in each other’s shoes.

As media is at the centre of social and political life, this raises questions about the roles of responsibilities of journalists, particularly as the erosion of local media services is commonly conceived as denying citizens the chance to build knowledge, to understand issues and be engaged with decisions affecting their lives, effectively decreasing their participation in democratic processes. While optimism lies with emerging digital media ventures, hyperlocal activity and new forms of collaboration with mainstream media, the medium of radio in these contemporary contexts is relatively under-researched despite it having never been so engaging, dynamic and important (UNESCO, 2017). Now easily accessed via smartphones and supported by online engagement, it provides people with opportunity to connect with their communities, geographic as well as virtual. Public service media, with its mandate to inform and entertain

all citizens, is also under pressure to reinvigorate its critical role in mediating public debate to engage the productive and progressive forces of the country (Barca, 2016).

Self-reflexive studies like this one offer particular perspectives that add to knowledge and understanding involved in media production. The thesis considered how radio journalism can better contribute to democratic and community principles, and examined three examples of broadcast, and to a very limited degree digital, formats that facilitate local engagement and debate. Understanding more about contemporary practices of journalism-as-conversation on public broadcasting radio contributes contemporary insights to scholarly literature and informs industry efforts to strengthen social ties, reflect diversity and restore public trust. With the impact of news media on democracy seen as cumulative (Tofel, 2013), this study examined local radio services, in an era of contemporary political and media turmoil, and how they engage with the social ideals at the heart of democracy, reflecting and sharing what people do and have in common. It has therefore been both a heuristic study of media practice and the normative approach of making judgements about contemporary practice in a fast-changing media and social environment.

8.2 Key findings

On a theoretical level, the analysis of data from *Community Conversations* offers important insights about contemporary local radio practices not easily discerned from more abstracted scholarly discussions on media, which tend to be focused on neoliberalism and global processes. Understanding more about the civic impact of journalism-as-conversation, the social and political web in which it operates and how it can better serve democratic ideals in society not only adds to scholarly debate about participation and changing functions of journalism, but

the findings have some practical implications for media organisations seeking greater civic engagement at the local level.

Following the review of relevant scholarly and industry knowledge in Chapters Two and Three, four key research questions were identified to guide analysis of data generated from three case studies of the ABC Local Radio's *Community Conversations* series in Tasmania in 2013. Using mixed research methods and analysis of discourse features, drawing also on the CMO context-method-outcome approach, this thesis produced the follow findings:

RQ1: How can citizens be involved in local radio conversations, and why does it matter?

The lack of audience-related data makes it difficult to draw firm conclusions in relation to this question. However, it is timely research given the fractious relationships between audiences and producers across the broad media spectrum. With a wider range of citizens involved and provided with a platform for voice, radio conversations (without technical interference) can better inform communities and be more effective at scrutinising the rich and powerful. While the internet has enabled Tasmanian citizens access to unprecedented media, many of the participants reported less news that is relevant and informative news available at the local level (Nielsen, 2015b; Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications, 2016). Frustration was expressed from participants about restricted media accountability, a lack of diversity and reduced opportunities for transparent public debate as a result of the growing local 'news gap' between the information communities would ideally have access to, and the information that is actually made available from independent sources of news (Currah, 2009). Participants expressed frustration about isolation and narrowness created by social media. Analysis of the data generated suggests deliberative media practices like these local radio

forums – despite their numerous limitations – provide a social space to enhance public discourse and citizen engagement which may, or may not be active, across other platforms by:

(1) Increasing a diversity of voices. Analysis of discourse features showed frequent perceptions of a lack of diversity of voices or depth in local media on contentious community issues in the past meant dominant institutional powers were unchallenged, identified by several participants as also producing barriers to social and economic change in Tasmania (Eslake, 2016), and restricting opportunities to connect and learn about others' perspectives. By the facilitation of including some previously marginalised voices, and bridging the expert-public gap, these radio events, to varying degrees, deepened public knowledge, potentially changing civic and political outcomes. The findings are supportive of scholarship that collaborative journalism projects do offer promise (not always realised in these case studies) for the reflection of greater diversity.

(2) Improving local accountability. Pro-development agendas in Tasmania supported by market liberal media, particularly newspaper, was perceived by some participants in interview as restrictive to public debate. The *Community Conversations*, to varying degrees, therefore expanded public knowledge and scrutiny, in contrast to restrictions imposed by neoliberal conceptions of the audience as consumer and the dominance of internet technologies, increasingly seen by scholars as making people less powerful in relation to government and corporations. For radio to directly engage with people involved with, and affected by, matters identified as being of importance to a community in geographic locale therefore helped produce insights and experiences that may never have come to light otherwise, and could lead to the prevention of government waste, local corruption and other serious community problems.

In these contexts, and based on the evidence of the three case studies, local radio conversation events can be conceived as creating a limited form of a contemporary public sphere, broadening

perceptions of newsworthiness to include solutions-orientated discourse, which can go part of the way to community problem-solving. However, they appear limited in addressing wider political challenges that stem from neoliberalism and changing technologies.

RQ2: What journalistic and media practices improve public debate and political conversation on radio?

With the media seen to be at the centre of society's shared experience, public interest must be served with the public themselves at the centre of the debate about what that entails.

Collaboration in these case studies was restricted to talkback, direct participation, and social media interaction. Greater online data would have expanded knowledge about the multiplatform potential of radio broadcasting however, it adds to the body of research about how **participation** is redefining the values and functions of journalism as norms and practices connected to ideal participation challenge the socio-cultural rationale for professional control over content creation, filtering and distribution.

Seeing journalism in the context of its practical relations and various interlocutors in these participatory radio formats showed that media frames are key analytical sites as journalists as part of making sense of an event. Discourse features of questions, affirmations and reflective listening that emerged in the data of the three *Community Conversation* are suggestive of **civic framing**, enhancing political knowledge and informing people how to participate. Data generated by this study demonstrates that civic framing captured *some* of the complexity of civic dialogue and in a number of ways improved public knowledge, by providing context, personal narratives and more information. This framing approach also supported people to confront awkward and sensitive problems in a collaborative and constructive way, even though data analysis showed there was evidence of passive consensus and self-censorship.

Source selection was determined by several factors in these events; personal connections, established profiles, previous engagement, expertise and the ability for ‘talent’ to participate or ‘perform’ in the discursive interaction. Personal and professional networks in local media, indicative of smaller communities, were particularly a feature of the regional event. Civic officials were included in all three events, however the approach of ABC content makers, driven by organisational ideology and strategic imperatives, did also attempt to widen participation to include local businesses, community activists and entrepreneurial citizens to avoid the dominance of civic officials in discourse. There was consistent awareness from ABC editorial staff of the importance of **recognition**, attempting to find a diversity of ‘authentic’ voices to ‘hear all sides’ and formed new forms of relationships between experts and laity. Willingness among participants and content makers to attempt understanding of other participants and show consideration of others’ as well as one’s own interests and equal opportunity to express those interests were features of **good faith**. While consensus was necessary for the formation of the events, key silences and framing shifts identified in the case studies led to some episodes of self-censorship, and passive consensus, supporting agonistic argument of the importance of conflict in democratic relations. Yet, simultaneously these *Community Conversations* provided, in part, the layer of ‘commonality’ necessary to bind together the radically plural polity Mouffe envisaged (2000), enabled by **tolerance**, suggesting that others’ opinions need to be allowed to enter within the arena in order to maintain a vibrant discourse and promote a ‘public conversation’ (Carey, 1995; Bovee, 1999) as the latest incarnation of an existing ‘discursive formation’ with the community rather than transformative process (Hall 1992b: 278).

An analysis of the interview data showed that *Community Conversations* encouraged invitees to ‘have a say’ with the expectation they will be listened to, and there was evidence of trust that they would be fairly treated. Participants said knowing that the presenter was **listening** to

them, and that others were prepared to listen to them, was vitally important. So too were the forum **settings**, all located away from the radio broadcast studios, removing the facilitator from the field of technical control and authority freeing up the conduct and content of the events. This was perceived by some participants and content makers as critical to boosting their confidence with participation, especially with the discreet placement of physical barriers like microphones. It must be noted however, analysis of discourse features show that the linear approach adopted by Brown restricted participation and interaction. The attitudes of interviewees provided some interesting insights into role of conventional broadcasting in the modern media environment. Radio's qualities of 'liveness' and generating affect were all observed in the three case studies to strengthen interaction, and at times, produce **empathy and trust**. However, some voices were prevented from participation by content maker bias, experience or perceptions (rightly or wrongly) that the individuals may not be able to have the appropriate skills to effectively communicate concerns or share authentic personal experiences. **Face-to-face interaction** was cited as important by participants as, allowing them to read body language and other non-verbal cues, supportive of research that relationship dynamics can lead to greater confidence in democratic approaches to governance as well as reduced ideological polarisation. Participation on- air was enhanced, albeit to a limited degree, by the **interaction** with others via talkback and digital platforms (SMS, Facebook, Twitter and blogs) before, after and during the event. While audience interactivity was relatively slow in 2013, there is evidence in the interview data that provided a limited sense of companionship and the opportunity for listeners to feel they can 'have a say or exercise their democratic rights' (Turner et al., 2006:6). The provision of on-demand audio, posted on line after the event, was also valued as shareable content and as an educational resource.

RQ3: How can local radio better contribute to social cohesion and building public trust?

The limited evidence available shows ABC Local Radio journalists played the role of facilitator or sense makers of public life. **Transparency** from journalists about the approach and conduct of the event developed trust and cooperation from participants, with expectations of a fair hearing, and the journalists were perceived to be responsive to local sensitivities and mindful of concerns regarding representation.

The case studies provided examples of a bottom-up journalism approach about distinctly local events and problems which **boosted information** levels and gave people a sense of community belonging and **empowerment**. Such findings advance research that media impact goes beyond the ideas of reach and engagement, by **equipping people with how to use news** and information in their personal and civic lives. This reformulation of local news making, and the shared experience, helped participants develop a greater sense of community, boost **social well-being**, and build social capital. There was support from participants for more **solutions-orientated journalism** with clear evidence of both **interest and civic commitment from journalists** to their communities and the expectation from participants, reinforcing previous empirical evidence, that people want the local media staff to be connected to the community. This research suggests a need for significant changes in the way journalists conceive of, and approach their role at the level of the local. There are parallels with these findings with those from community radio research, in dealing with notions of community connection, identity and addressing the challenge of the producer-audience barrier. Could a melding of ABC expertise and community radio's proven audience engagement strategies offer a way forward for this type of journalism?

RQ4: Can public broadcasting radio in the 21st Century improve democracy? If so, how?

The data offers limited insights to this question. It suggests more intense resourcing and support for local media activity and active promotion of diversity is needed to deepen democratic practices of public broadcasting radio. The intense focus on **localism** in these *Community Conversations* and efforts to include a **diversity** of voices (albeit to varying degrees of success) were driven by the ABC organisational ideology and strategy. It was a deliberate journalistic effort to bring people together around a shared sense of vital issues, including those from subordinate groups. Despite varying restrictions, the provision and facilitation of these forums for information, enabled some of the voices underrepresented in dominant discourse to be heard. These public service journalists were therefore not only **informing**, but **weighing the consequences** of the policies being enacted with the wider community, an extension of recent research showing people who follow local news more know more about local public affairs. Journalistic practices, aligned with editorial policies and ABC organisational values of **integrity, respect, collegiality and innovation** guided source relations, setting and framing approaches. Participants reported a high level of **trust** in the **tolerance**, and **transparency** of the content makers, which encouraged participation. However, the importance of diversity at the source and content level emerged as critical to achieving these aims. A key area to explore is the recruitment and values of journalists themselves, as identified in the ABC' current diversity plan.

Overall, the findings of the thesis therefore add to understanding of democracy not just as political concept but also a **social ideal**. Talk radio was shown to contribute, despite some numerous restrictions, to reflect citizens' concerns and enable political conversation by identifying solutions and **building consensus**, seen by some scholars as necessary for democratic relations. It also contributes to understanding more about the impact of media practice and **local voice**, specifically, the sociology of voice and listening in local landscapes

with the data supporting research that local media conversations can teach people turn taking, negotiation and other rhythms of respect and help tie communities together.

In light of these findings, *Community Conversations* can be viewed as perhaps an example of the type of innovation or ‘action opportunity’ (Couldry et al., 2007) needed for communities and those disenfranchised by the ‘dominant set of political and cultural codes and practices’ (Flew, 1991:29), reinforcing research that purports the function of public service media is to reflect diversity and provide spaces that promote national, regional, and local identities. This study provides some practical insights in the practices and pressures faced by local, public broadcasting radio journalists as they juggle time, technology, deadlines, and increasingly complex workflows to manage conflicting demands. It contributes to the literature in the under theorised medium of radio, and research into journalism-as-conversation as a way of building public trust. It expands knowledge about the functions and role of local journalists, and how they participate in and contribute to social cohesion in their local communities. Hence, this thesis contributes to scholarship about the changing nature of journalism and role of public radio broadcasting in the contemporary communications environment.

8.3 Reflections on research

As discussed in Chapter Four, the pace of change in audience behaviour, media industry and journalistic work practices is fast, and confusing. Scholarly and industry research is struggling to keep abreast of the complexity and tensions of contemporary local media, citizen engagement and the changing functions of journalism. In the period of four years between the *Community Conversations* and the completion of this thesis, much has changed in technology, audience interaction and journalistic practice. At times, this has presented enormous frustration to me as I attempted to update and contextualise changes to ensure the inclusion of pertinent

contemporary scholarly and empirical insights into current local media practices and the impact they have on citizen engagement and public discourse. I am unsettled by the fact that some of this thesis, based on three case studies in 2013, is already out-of-date upon its completion. This is an anathema to me as a journalist, used to providing relevant updates right up to deadline. It comforts me as a scholar, though, to provide this data and its findings, despite considerable limitations, as a contribution to the body of literature on the important connection between citizens, local media, radio, public broadcasting, and democracy during this volatile time as much of the scholarly work is focused on globalism and neoliberal processes. My hope is that it this contribution provides a useful set of practical reflections on practice and participation in the under-researched field of local radio and citizen engagement and provide guidance for practices encouraging more nuanced debate and collaboration.

A significant disadvantage of the textual analysis in this thesis is the restricted amount of insights into how audiences perceived, or potentially used, the *Community Conversations*. While there was a small amount of specific audience engagement and feedback about the radio forums via Facebook, Twitter, email, and anecdotal exchange as discussed in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven, the amount of data was regrettably sparse. This was due to program social media interaction being relatively underdeveloped at the time of this research. Data analytics are now available to analyse this type of data and would provide a rich layer of data to future analysis into my research questions. This aspect of data gathering highlights the importance of studying media practices and routines in a contemporary context (Straubhaar et al., 2013; Karlsson, 2011).

Some limitations of this researcher were discussed in Chapter Four. I had no issues with access to the forums and their participants, and was familiar with the industry jargon, practices and was known to many of the people involved. Sociologist Philip Schlesinger, who studied BBC practices during Northern Ireland tension, points out one of the benefits of this type of direct

access to the understanding of those involved in media production is that it might dispel any undue resort to ‘conspiracy theories in describing news production’ (Schlesinger, 1990:363-4). However, it did mean that the data may have been compromised by my organisational priorities and professional biases. Focusing on activities relating to UTAS in Chapter Seven while a PhD student enrolled at the very same institution, also raises questions about conducting this sort of research while actively involved in the processes and institutions under examination. Another key limitation of this project was a host of unrelated factors limiting comprehensive collection of data for analysis from participants in the ABC Local Radio *Community Conversation* case studies, including the lack of availability of some of the sources for interview.

Future opportunities

As explored in this thesis, the organising principles and impact of journalism-as-conversation needs to be understood more as part of the changing functions and values of public and citizen journalism. In this era of political polarisation and public disengagement, more needs to be known about ways of facilitating more nuanced public debate inclusive of a diversity of voices.

While this thesis was primarily focused on analogue radio and extremely limited digital interaction, the evolving role of technology in enabling large-scale civic discussions with design initiatives like *Hearken* and *The Listening Project*, detailed in Chapter Two, provide exciting avenues for future researchers. Such collaborative, public connection projects which focus on voice and participation warrant further scholarly attention in contemporary political and media environments. Understanding more about such newsroom practices and public collaboration would also help the media industry identify best practice and investment opportunities for the future. At the time of writing, the ABC is rolling out *Hearken’s Curious City* projects to major metropolitan and regional centres.

Further research into audience reaction and interaction with local radio programming and public discourse as it evolves would also be valuable. Data on audience engagement and activity supplements qualitative case studies like this thesis, helping provide further insights into how ordinary viewers or readers construct meant from specific texts or groups of texts. Indeed, ways to measure media impact different from reach, circulation or readership need further investigation, for example the suggestion (Zuckerman, 2011) that participation is a possible metric of impact – if people take a measurable civic action after hearing of an issue in their local media.

With only limited insights from participants in these three case studies, more also needs to be understood about the exchange between journalists and audiences in an increasingly networked environment. Firstly, the study needs to be approached in relation to the people formerly known as news sources who are often communicating, sometimes unmediated, to local publics using new media platforms and playing ever-greater roles in framing public life. What are their expectations? Content makers cited the ability of participants to ‘perform’ as a key criterion of inclusion which raises questions about barriers to public participation. Do mainstream media staff need to be involved in supporting, possibly even training, those participants who may current lack the requisite media skills to participate in journalism-as-conversation? Should some form of media literacy and empowerment become an outreach service for public service media outlets, particularly amongst younger citizens?

Secondly, collaborative and reciprocal community journalism places journalists as community-builders (Lewis et al., 2013), or potentially working towards solutions. Is this what the media professionals signed up for? What training and support do they need or receive? Pressures of time and workflow demands were identified as restrictions to more extended research and locating a greater diversity of voices in *Community Conversations*.

Therefore, both fast-moving, multi-platform media workplaces (Boyer, 2013), and interpersonal practices like listening and face-to-face interaction, are worthy of more scholarly consideration in the context of media power, practice and the development of social capital. Is there scope for journalists and institutions to provide and facilitate social and public spaces for communication (Stray, 2015), giving everyday experiences and opinions a new and powerful legitimisation?

With personal connections and interests shown to be influential to the selection of sources in these case studies, how to generate more workforce, content diversity and source diversity is also an important line of inquiry for future researchers. More needs to be understood about the organisational barriers to recruitment and retention of media practitioners from a diversity of socio-economic, ethnic and geographic backgrounds to guard against insularity of views, attitudes and approaches. Diverse perspectives go beyond race and diversity; the challenge is for newsrooms to cultivate journalists that represent a broad section of the community. This means more journalists who understand religions beyond Christianity; more who know what it is like to live in poverty or how to run a small business.

Despite its various limitations, this thesis has engaged with international scholarship on voice, local journalism and civic engagement and provided some key insights conceptions of democracy as a social ideal. These contributions offer value to media professionals, citizens and governments dealing with media policy and practice at a time of worrying change. Some of these insights, particularly relating to media practices, literacy and community engagement, are already guiding project work at the ABC to deepen and widen local journalism, both for traditional and emerging audiences. With mobile platforms and social media increasingly popular ways of accessing news and information, Managing Director Michelle Guthrie says focus will be on prioritising adequate investment to these areas and using collaboration, creativity, and digital dexterity across divisions to ensure that programming and community

engagement is rich, multi-dimensional and fully accessible (ABC, 2016a).

8.4 A final moment

Conversations in a town or neighbourhood, shared through media, make a difference in personal and political ways, strengthening the social ideal of democracy and social cohesion.

After Rotary members heard about racism in Launceston on ABC Radio's *Community Conversation*, they invited four international students to join their meetings in 2013. It deepened multicultural knowledge and awareness.

One of the students invited was Agatha Aasiimwe, from Uganda. Agatha said she had been struggling with Tasmania as 'a difficult community to break through'. However, being invited to the Rotary meetings presented a breakthrough. It enabled her to make friends and understand her new community better. The social connections, links and community knowledge made her feel safer in her new city, ready to engage with its people and conduct research into the experiences of migrant children in early education.

Agatha Aasiime now lives in Philadelphia, USA and is part of the therapeutic support staff team at Carson Valley Children's Aid, providing mental health services to at-risk children and young adults at school, children's homes or in the community.

The need for such social inclusion and deeper public engagement on contentious issues is becoming greater. Two years after the ABC *Community Conversations* at the centre of this study, the University of Tasmania and *The Mercury* newspaper asked local and national expert panels to consider some of Tasmania's social and economic challenges. This was because 'it is becoming harder for governments to address them in an increasingly adversarial and volatile

political atmosphere' (Eccleston and Bowell, 2016). More than 700 people attended the meetings, while a further 2000 viewed the discussions online via Livestream.

Consensus developed frequently, even on the most historically polarising issues, like environmental management and heritage development, explored in detail in Chapter Five of this thesis. It emerged from participants during the public forums that polarising conflict, somehow, needs to be overcome in Tasmania's economic and social future is to progress. Development must be environmentally and socially sustainable, respecting precious preserved history and natural environments. Better education, social and physical infrastructure is required. Voices need to be heard and listened to.

Consistent with the findings and analysis generated from the data from three ABC *Community Conversations* in 2013, community-led engagement and leadership were identified as vital to Tasmanians forging a better future. The need for a transparent local media to keep working in good faith and recognition with its community to enable a vibrant democracy has perhaps never been greater.

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Appendices:

1. *Community Conversation* guests

John Ali - Business manager and community development officer, Migrant Resource Centre

Jo Archer – Community development officer, University of Tasmania

Chris Ball – ABC Broadcaster, producer ABC Northern Tasmania *Drive* program

Kristen Desmond - Chairwoman, Tasmanian Disability Education Reform Lobby Group

Natalie DeVito - Festival Director, Junction Arts Festival

Aaron Everett- Aboriginal heritage officer, Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre.

Lou Garnier – Content Director, 936 ABC Hobart

Kathy Gates – Marketing Manager, ABC Radio Tasmania

Sarah Gillman – ABC Broadcaster, producer 936 ABC Hobart *Drive* program

Lynne James - Director of Disability Programs, Tasmanian Department of Education.

Paul Johnston – Convenor, Significant Buildings Committee at the Australian Institute of Architects. Advisory architect to the Works Committee of the Tasmanian Heritage Council.

Adrian Kelly – President, Tasmanian Real Estate Institute

Briony Kidd – Convenor, Save10Murray campaign

Michael Merrington – Content Director, ABC Northern Tasmania.

Sallyann McShane - Parent, disability advocate

Terry Polglase – President, Australian Education Union – Tasmania.

Christopher Rayner – Lecturer in Inclusive Education, School of Education at the University of Tasmania

Louise Saunders – ABC Broadcaster, presenter 936 ABC Hobart *Drive* program

Mark Scott – Managing Director, ABC

Dianne Snowden – Chairwoman, Tasmanian Heritage Council

Carol Raabus - ABC Cross media reporter, 936 ABC Hobart.

2. *Community Conversation* event details

Community Conversation: whose heritage is worth saving? (936 ABC Hobart, *Drive* program): 21 May, 2013

Community Conversation: disability in education (936 ABC Hobart, *Drive* program): 19 March, 2013

Community Conversation: international students in Tasmania (Launceston) (ABC Northern Tasmania, *Drive* program): 4 March, 2013

3. Guiding framework of questions used to stimulate discussion

Participants:

Who are they, how did they become involved with the event?

How were they approached to be involved?

Any concerns about participation?

What their expectations were at the outset?

What did they think of the experience - setting and conduct of the content makers and other participants?

Were their expectations of participating met? if so how?

What impact and/or feedback, if any, had emerged as a result of their participation?

Was it worthwhile? Would they be involved in something similar again – why?

How did participation in the *Community Conversation* differ to other forms of media engagement they may have experienced?

What are their thoughts on how this radio format compares with other forms of media like Facebook, Twitter, TV and print in terms of connection in the contemporary communications environment.

How do you view this format in terms of the functions of journalism? Of the ABC?

Any other observations or reflections?

Content makers/managers

What is their association to *Community Conversations*?

How was the topic arrived at?

Describe the aim of event.

Who was involved – describe the process of identifying and engaging sources.

How did they prepare for the event – considerations of research, technical requirements, setting etc

What was online engagement before, after and during the event– any reflections or learnings here?

What was their specific role in the broadcast?

Any specific observations about the conduct of participants or colleagues?

What is their perspective on the way the conversation unfolded?

What feedback did they receive from listeners, or digital followers on social media or station website? Reaction to that?

What impact, if any, did the broadcast have in terms of facilitating political or social change?

What worked? What didn't? Any lessons for next time?

How do you view this radio conversational format in terms of the functions of journalism?

How does it align with the ABC's purpose and role in the community?

Any other observations or reflections to share?

